Aquinata Böckmann

A Commentary on Chapters 4–7 of Benedict's Rule

FROM THE Tools of Good Works TO THE Heart of Humility

VISIT…

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"Sister Aquinata Böckmann is among the foremost contemporary exegetes of the Rule of Saint Benedict. This latest part of her magisterial commentary to be translated covers the chapters that deal most directly with the Rule's spiritual teaching: good works, obedience, silence, and humility. As such, it will be a useful and delightful tool for any who seriously want to penetrate the meaning of the text and to learn a methodology both for understanding what Saint Benedict wrote and for appreciating the personal qualities of the author. A book for any serious reader of the Rule of Saint Benedict."

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—Carmel Posa, SGS
Co-editor of *Tjurunga: An Australasian Benedictine Review*

Aquinata Böckmann, OSB

From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility

A Commentary on Chapters 4–7 of Benedict's Rule

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The numbering of the psalms follows the Vulgate in the context of Latin texts; otherwise it follows the NAB translation. In ambiguous cases both numbers are given.

The translation of RB in the German original is the author's own; the English translation is based on the author's German translation and on the Latin.

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Preface

This book contains the four chapters of Benedict's Rule (RB 4–7) that represent the so-called spiritual foundation of his Rule. Chapter 4, on the instruments of good works, could even be considered a summary of the Rule. It is followed by the equally important chapters on obedience, silence, and humility. This chapter is the longest in RB and constitutes, as it were, the first focal point of an ellipsis, whose second focal point is chapter 72, on the good zeal. These four chapters, which are added to the fundamental chapters RB 1–3,[1] clearly show how Benedict used his immediate source, the Rule of the Master (*Regula Magistri*). While he copied it to a large extent, it is all the more important to note what he omitted from the text of RM and what he added or changed in actual quotes, even if the change consists in just a few words. As already noted in the preface to *A Listening Community*, it is here again very important to read the two texts—the Master and Benedict—side by side. Reading RB in the context of his sources helps us to see more clearly the character of Benedict.

When explaining such important texts, it is—as far as possible—necessary to refrain from inserting one's own ideas into the text, and instead to listen closely to what the text itself has to say. For doing this, structural exegesis has been of great help to me. I will present each chapter, or each part of a chapter, trying to detect the particular structure of the text. Often circular structures (chiastic forms) are discovered, although only the course of the detailed exegesis will show whether the verse or verses in the center indeed contain the core of Benedict's message. Evidently not every sentence in a chapter has the same weight.

1. The commentary on the Prologue and RB 1–3 is found in *A Listening Community* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015). In Sr. Aquinata's German commentary the first volume (2011) contains the Prologue and RB 1–7; the second (2011), RB 8–52; and the third (2015), RB 53–72. Earlier commentary on verses 1-4 and 45-50 of the Prologue and RB 72 is available in English translation in *Perspectives on the Rule of Saint Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).

I basically follow the principles of biblical exegesis. First, I look at the text itself, then I look for possible sources (here very often the Rule of the Master), and only then does it become important for me to explore what a particular text may have to say to us today. Especially in this part of the Rule, it seems very important to me not to remain on the surface of the words but rather to investigate the particular aim of an instruction or in what direction it is designed to form us. And then we need to ask ourselves what steps—however small—will help us today to approach the goal.

Two images helped me in working with text in this manner. The first one comes from my friend Jacques Dupont, a biblical exegete, who said that reading a text is like blowing softly again and again into ashes until the flame emerges. In a second image I compare this way of reading with rubbing matches, or rubbing two uneven stones—the text and our feeling—until the flame appears.

Most of the commentaries on RB we use were written by abbots or monks. Up to now we have only a few written by Benedictine women living in their community. The common life does not leave much time for writing, but it has the advantage that the commentary remains in the reality of daily common life. I am grateful to have lived in my international community in Rome since 1973. Although community life always takes up much time, it also helps me to remain close to the "earth" in my work with Benedict's Rule. In seminars, in conferences, and on visits I have been able to experience other monastic communities on the different continents. I also owe much to my students and my colleagues at the Benedictine University of San Anselmo in Rome where I was able to teach for almost forty years.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my superiors and fellow sisters for all their help; to all my students and colleagues for constructive criticism; to Sr. Marianne Burkhard, OSB, and Sr. Andrea Westkamp, OSB, for the translation of this book into English; and to Liturgical Press for their encouragement and acceptance of the manuscript.

Sr. Aquinata Böckmann, OSB
September 17, 2016
Rome

Chapter 4

The Instruments of Good Works

The word "instruments" (or "tools") generates associations of work, of workshop. It could also remind us of sentences and official documents (currently, for instance, *Instrumentum laboris* as preparation for a conference of bishops). The title makes us aware of Benedict's down-to-earth stance.

According to its form, this chapter is a collection of maxims, a catalogue of virtues and vices, a collection of sayings with moral aphorisms. These could be repeated in a way that they could penetrate the heart and from there affect the whole person. The Bible already contained such collections: for instance, the Ten Commandments, the book of Proverbs, the catalogues of vices and virtues of the Bible. There are also apocryphal texts of the first centuries, however, that contain such collections of sayings, for instance, the *Sententiae* of Sextus; they can also be found, for example, in the *Passio Juliani* (cf. below).

Herwegen points to the Rite of Baptism. Initially, the question is: What do you seek from the Church of God? Faith. What does faith accomplish? Eternal life. "If you want to gain eternal life, obey the commandments. You should love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind and your neighbor as yourself."[1] The Rule of the Master (RM) points out the same at the beginning of chapter 3 with the profession of the Trinity (v. 1). Basically, this is about living a Christian life.

1. Herwegen, 88, refers to *Pontificale Romanum*.

God has invited, gifted us (Prologue[2]); now the conversion in everyday life needs to occur (cf. for possible resources below). Surely, the origins of this chapter can be seen in connection with the instructions for baptism in the early Christian community. Such instructions are based on Sacred Scripture, the New and Old Testament. When introducing people to the practice of Christian life, it was important to have something that was easy to memorize. Puzicha[3] mentions also the genre of the *Testimonia*, as, for example, Cyprian's *Ad Quirinium*. Collections of quotes from other writings (*florilegia*) were very popular, as is also evident in our two rules.

Similar to Christian instruction of the catechumens that builds on the basics of Christian virtues, there is also monastic instruction. Such instructions we find in the Rule of the Master and the Rule of Benedict. Smaller collections of sayings are found already in the Prologue: RM Ths.13 and RB Prol.17 in the explanation of Psalm 33/34, and Ths.21-28, Prol.25-32 in the explanation of Psalm 14/15.

According to Masai and Manning, the collection of sayings was part of a spiritual treatise that in RM encompassed the theme and everything up to the end of the chapter on humility, where we read: "Here ends the treatment of the heart's service: How to flee sin through fear of God" (RM 10.123). Yet, he did not mark a corresponding beginning with its own *incipit*.[4] It only precedes the title of RM 1: "The kinds, drink, conduct, and life of monks in monasteries." If we look at the complete so-called spiritual part, however, it certainly has quite different chapters. At least, chapters 1–2 are of a different kind. RM 7–10 (RB 5–7) are already typical monastic texts. Between these two blocks are RM 3–6 on the Holy Art. Especially RM 3 is based initially on Christian virtues or vices and has only a few monastic applications or concretizations. It certainly is a good hint that our life in the monastery is supposed to be a good human and Christian life, as it flows out of the gift of baptism.[5]

The Master seems to love the symbolism of the spiritual art as he speaks of instruments, of matter, of rust, of the workshop. The abbot is the *artifex* (e.g., 2.51), the master of the workshop; he teaches the spiritual craft.

At this point, we may indicate that the Master uses easy transitions from one chapter to the next, which point toward this art. At the end of chapter

2. Cf. commentary on the Prologue and in Böckmann, *Listening Community* (2015).

3. Puzicha, 95; see also *Quellen*, 80f.

4. The theme in RM has an *incipit* and an *explicit*. After his chapter on humility the Master connects the following part with the title "Here begins the Organization of the monastery . . ."

5. Cf. helpful introduction in Kardong, 96–102; Bozzi 1, 232–33.

1, he introduces the teacher. The end of chapter 2 (what characteristics the abbot should have), however, points more clearly to the doctrine in 2.51f., "The abbot is therefore the master [*artifex*] of this holy art, not attributing the performance of it to himself but to the Lord, whose grace achieves [*fabricatur*] in us whatever we do that is holy. This art must be taught and learned in the workshop of the monastery, and it can be practiced with the use of spiritual instruments."

In RB and RM, we can note a sequence of chapters: After Benedict describes the main structure—Cenobites, Abbot, Council (RB 1–3)—four more chapters follow, which refer to the moral life of the monks: RB 4 as a summary, so to speak, then Obedience (RB 5), Silence (RB 6), and Humility (RB 7). We find a similar sequence in RM: RM 1–2 (with an addendum about the Council), RM 3–6 the spiritual art, and here RM 3 generally corresponds to RB 4. RM 4 is a catalog of virtues, RM 5 a catalog of vices, and RM 6 speaks of practicing the spiritual instruments in the monastery. Significantly, in RM, these chapters follow the chapter on the abbot so as to show the content of the abbot's teaching or, we would say, as his book of instructions.

This is not the case in RB 4. It is a collection of sayings, which we can literally picture as a manual of monastic life in the hands of the monks. RM 3.84-95 ends the third chapter with a broad illustration of the eternal glory (based on apocryphal texts). Benedict omits such descriptions here and at the end of RB 7 (cf. RM 10.92-122). Vogüé thinks an earlier editing of RM might have looked as follows: RM 3.1-78, then 4.1-10 (spiritual instruments), and at the end the workshop (6.1-2). This means that the illustration of paradise in 3.79-95 and the catalog of vices (5.1-11) were added later.[6] Following these chapters are the ones on Obedience (RM 7), Silence (RM 8–9 with anthropological treatise), and Humility (RM 10).

OVERVIEW OF RB 4

Even though it appears as if the sayings are loosely strung together, one can recognize that some of them form pairs or small paragraphs, a collection of sayings relating to specific content. An attempt at a rough organization of the text took place. The exegesis will show if this proves to be correct.

A Vv. 1-2 Love of God and neighbor
  B Main emphasis on the conduct toward neighbor
    Vv. 3-9 OT
    Vv. 10-19 NT (Matt); 20-21 transition

6. Cf. Vogüé *IV*, 176–79 on the various editions.

Vv. 22-33 Love of neighbor, modeled after the Beatitudes
C Vv. 34-40 Renunciation (how not to be)
D Vv. 41-50 *Custodia*, living in God's presence
D' Vv. 51-58 Means to go about this (silence, reading, prayer)
C Vv. 59-64 Renouncing oneself
B' Vv. 65-73 Main emphasis on conduct toward neighbor
A' Vv. 74-75 Love of God, "what God works for those who love him"

Looking over the chapter once more, we can mention Dorotheus of Gaza who says that one cannot build a house with only *one* wall and that for the construction of the spiritual life the collaboration of all the virtues is needed. Yes, if one builds just one very high wall instead of all the walls together at the same time, there is danger of it tumbling over. The foundation would be faith, and then the other walls would be added, i.e., obedience, patience (Cf. *Instr.* XIV, 150f.).

Apparently, Benedict created his own circular structure in which God's love forms the embracing ring (not in RM); the love of neighbor is then treated broadly in the middle. Of course, all of this requires renunciation (C and C'). In the center, the focus is again on God, the Lord, the last things (D), and is then followed by the instruments, which will help us to guard ourselves (*custodia*).

TITLE: THE TOOLS OF GOOD WORKS (*QUAE SUNT INSTRUMENTA BONORUM OPERUM*)

This title is Benedict's own. In RM we read, "What is the holy art that the abbot must teach his disciples in the monastery?" Thus, the connection with the previous chapter is more obvious. Explicitly, the Master says that this chapter is like a directory of his teachings to his students. Benedict changes the "holy art" to "good works," a phrase that appears only one more time, namely, in 2.21: "Only in one way are we distinguished in his eyes when we surpass others in good works and being humble." This is an addendum to the text of the Master. With this passage, Benedict created a connection to RB 4 but characteristically in texts that speak of community. Benedict does not write primarily from the perspective of the abbot, as does RM, which emphasizes the vertical line: student and master. It is significant for Benedict that, in general, he places greater emphasis on the community. Besides, his chapter title is more practical; "holy art" could sound more theoretical. In RM, the abbot is the art teacher; in RB—we might say—all are learning to use these instruments. In short, RM states what one has to teach (from the perspective of the abbot), RB what one has to learn (from the perspective

of the community). The "good works" are much more down to earth than the "holy art."

The Master begins this chapter with a creed: "This is the holy art: first to believe in, to confess and to fear God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God in Trinity, the three in one, three in the one divine nature and one the threefold power of his majesty. Therefore, to love him with all one's heart and all one's soul" (3.1). The first commandment is not love, but first belief, confession of faith, and fear of God, and love comes only later, toward the end of this passage. We can find the same approach of connecting the first commandment of the Scriptures with the trinitarian baptismal formula in Pirmin of Reichenau, who might have been influenced by RM.[7] Was this formula already in manuscript P (which Benedict possibly knew)? It is not impossible. The Master's interest is theological; Benedict's less so.

Vv. 1-2: First of all, love God, the Lord, with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength; then love your neighbor as yourself. (*In primis "Dominum Deum diligere ex toto corde, tota anima, tota virtute"; deinde proximum tamquam seipsum.*)

While in RM believing and loving are focused on the triune God, for Benedict the love of God is aligned to the Bible, to "God, the Lord," with which he starts his chapter. RM shows marked differences and says about love of neighbor: "Then in second place to love one's neighbor as oneself." May we interpret this? Is love of neighbor seen as subordinate? Benedict prefaces the entire list of virtues quite clearly with the connection between love of God and love of neighbor, on which all the other tools depend. This is a difference to RB 7, in which the journey from fear to love is described (although Benedict did not pursue this as vigorously as the Master). Benedict is more consistent in basing everything on the love of God and neighbor since he has famous models, e.g., the *Didache*, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles. After mentioning the path to life and death in one sentence, the *Didache* continues: "The path of life is now this: 1. You shall love your God who created you, 2. your neighbor as yourself, but everything that you do not want done to yourself, do not do to another" (1.2). Then several other instruments follow.

Assuming the double commandment of love in his rules, Basil says: "Therefore the Lord himself established the order of his commandments. As first and greatest commandment, he ordered the love of God. The

7. Cf. Vogüé, "Scholies" 149, 266; idem, "Le fils" on the discussion if Benedict found this formula in Rome already; it is also possible that this formula came from Lérins, cf. Bozzi 1, 233.

second one in this sequence is the commandment of love of neighbor, which is similar to the first or, more accurately, it complements the first and follows from it."[8] Basil's next rule contains the entire Christian and thereby monastic life in community (*Reg* 2–3). In addition, the *Ordo monasterii* (*OM*, its first sentence is probably by Augustine himself) begins with this central precept: "Above all, dearest brothers, God is to be loved, then the neighbor, for these are the commandments that were given to us before all others."[9]

Sacred Scripture makes it very clear that the double commandment is the fulfillment of the entire law (Matt 22:40). Jesus took the first commandment of God's love from Deuteronomy 6 and added that a second one was equal to the first: loving one's neighbor like oneself. RB 4.1 is melted together from different Scripture passages but is closest to Mark 12:30-31 in the Latin. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."[10] It is possible that the formulation of the first commandment stems directly from Cyprian.[11] Many profound articles and books have been written about this double commandment. What is the first and the second, what is indirect, and what is direct? After all, Benedict seems to want to show that love of God flows into love of neighbor, and, conversely, love of neighbor is the measure of the love of God.[12]

In primis (first)! The priority of the love of God is evident. RM has not emphasized this as strongly as it rather sees the love of God as a logical consequence of the confession of the triune and one God. Similarly, Benedict states at the beginning of the Prologue (4): "First of all, whenever you begin a good work, you are to pray most earnestly that he will complete it." In the chapter on the abbot he adds to his source "Seek first the reign of God" (RB 2.35). RB stresses some priorities in this context: Reign of God, prayer, love, humility, tending to the sick, and *lectio divina*.

We can also call to mind the priority of the *Opus Dei* to which nothing is to be preferred (43.3) or the statement that we are to prefer nothing whatever to the love of Christ (72.11; cf. also 4.21). We may point to Psalm 72/73:25: "Whom else have I in the heavens? None beside you delights me on earth." *In primis* does not appear in the Vulgate very often; the meaning of 1 Corin-

8. *Regfus* 1; *Reg* 1.4-5; cf. also PsBasil *Adm* 3.

9. Cf. also *RegMac* 1.2-3.

10. Mark 12:30f. Cf. Deut 6:5; also Luke 10:27; Matt 22:37-39.

11. *De dom. or.* 28; yet manuscripts of the biblical text also have, like Mark, the three-pronged expression *cor*, *anima*, *virtus.*

12. Huerre, 69.

thians 15:3 is the closest: "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received."[13] What is at stake here is the importance of the tradition, as it refers to death and resurrection, hence an absolute priority. Looking back to the text of RB, love of neighbor can only come second (*deinde*) with respect to the priority of love of God.

Love with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. Usually, *diligere* is translated with "loving" and has to do with *eligere*, to choose, to decide. It contains an act of the will. According to Sacred Scripture, *diligere* also signifies that something is not just theory but is expressed in good works and realized in "observing the commandments."

This tool is quite radical; there are three repetitions, as in the Bible: "with all your" (*totus*). Since God loves us radically and infinitely, we cannot but answer radically and completely. Partial love is not commensurate with God's love. This is an impossible commandment if we focus only on ourselves. Yet God loves us with boundless love first and thus prompts a radical response.

Heart, soul, strength (*cor*, *anima*, *virtus*)—I would like to suggest that this trinity comes from Cyprian, referring to Mark 12:30f.[14] The Master wrote, "With whole heart and whole soul," whereas the common gospel texts have a four-pronged expression: heart, soul, mind, strength or strengths. As emphasized before, Benedict loves tripartite expressions.

Primarily, the heart signifies the core of a person. The soul connotes not just the breath of life but also the human capacity of decision making and the total person with respect to his or her eternal destiny.[15] *Virtus* most likely articulates strength. In RB the phrase "with all your strength" is used in 49.2 with the same meaning: "Since few, however, have the strength" to live always on the height of monasticism as in the season of Lent. According to the word's use in biblical language, *virtus* signifies suitability, strength, efficiency, power, capability. It is an impossible demand, and the more we try it with all our strength, the more we will discover our own inadequacy. It is, however, the only possible response to God's love for us, with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength. I believe this kind of response is possible only in the Holy Spirit.

Then to love your neighbor as yourself. This reminds us of Luke 10:29, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan, who was neighbor to the one who was attacked by robbers (Luke 10:25-37). In the monastery, my neighbors surely are the members of the community and,

13. Author's translation of the Vulgate.
14. *De dom. or.* 28; cf. Mark 12:30f., but not according to Vulg.
15. Cf. Böckmann, "Der Mensch," 44.

among them, those who especially rely on me. Paul makes it clear that all the commandments are summed up in this one: You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14). The fullness of the law is love (Rom 13:10).

The word "neighbor" with this meaning appears in RB and RM only in biblical quotes and, significantly for Benedict, in the lessons on the psalms for a good life: Prol.27 (twice). It is possible that this was easily misunderstood in the monastic context, for instance, that some are closer than others, or the other way around, that everyone is meant.

Self-love is not the point here, but it is made clear how much we should love our neighbor, namely, the way we usually love ourselves. This instrument refers to verse 9 (positively expressed): What we would like others to do to us, that we should also do to them.

We want to finish the first section with the collect of the Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time: "Holy God, you have given us the commandment to love you and to love our neighbor as the fulfillment of the law. Give us the strength to obey this commandment faithfully so that we may gain eternal life."

V. 3: Then: not to kill,
V. 4: not to commit adultery;
V. 5: not to steal,
V. 6: not to covet;
V. 7: not to bear false witness;
V. 8: honor everyone,
V. 9: and never do to another what you do not want done to yourself.

The instruments in verses 3-7 share a similar pattern; five of them begin with "not." The negative, the cutting off what is not in harmony with God, is necessarily also part of the path to God. Recall again that this is basic Christian instruction. The phrasing also points to the Christian baptismal formula (*non* and the verb in the infinitive at the end). We could be startled to find such elementary demands in a rule for monks, but the history of religious life shows that such things really happened. Gregory already recounts such terrible sins in Benedict's community or environment (Vicovaro).[16]

Five of the Ten Commandments stem from different traditions of the gospels.[17] We do not have our sequence in any of these texts. All five commandments appear in Exodus 20:12-17 and Deuteronomy 6:16-21, although RM and RB changed the sequence; "bearing false witness" comes after "not to covet," and "honor father and mother" should be the fourth commandment

16. *Dial* II 3.1-4.
17. E.g., Luke 18:20; Matt 19:18f.; cf. Exod 20:12-21; Deut 5:16-21.

but appears as the sixth in RM. This prompts us to think that this rearrangement was deliberate. Maybe "bearing false witness" was seen as consequence of coveting. "Honor father and mother" is viewed positively in the biblical texts. One could see the Golden Rule as a positive consequence of verse 9.

V. 3: Then: not to kill, (*Deinde non occidere,*)

This stands in strongest opposition to the love of neighbor. One is reminded of 1 John 3:15, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer." Smaragdus (166) refers to this scriptural text and to Wisdom 16:14.

Benedict knows the recesses of the human heart. His experiences stem from Vicovaro, when the monks tried to kill him. Today, we can expand the commandment as it also deals with indirect offenses, allowing that human beings are killed—there is a broad field of application. People speak of "character assassination." One can kill another through slander, defamation, degradation, and, finally, not expecting anything good of another, so that the person will lose all confidence in him- or herself. One can enslave a person in a way that she loses her sense of self. Finally, nowadays, there is also bullying. Our monasteries are not totally exempt from such behavior. Verse 3 has great relevance in society; just think of the discussion of abortion, euthanasia, death penalty, stem-cell research, etc. Sexual abuse could be counted among these.

V. 4: not to commit adultery; (*non adulterare,*)

Folk etymology describes the meaning of the Latin word as "going to another" (*ad alterum ire*).[18] We should acknowledge that this has really happened in monastic history and is still occurring. In Scripture, we see the connection between adultery and murder in the stories of David and the wife of Uriah in 2 Samuel 11 and also of Susanna and her judgment in Daniel 13. Looking at somebody with lust is part of what the Bible understands by adultery (Matt 5:27). By lusting with our eyes, we can commit adultery. The Bible further speaks of adultery in connection with the covenant. God and God's people have entered a kind of marital covenant. Israel has violated the marital covenant and has become an adulterous people (Hos 7:4; Ezek 23:37; Jer 23:14). Seen in this context, there are many possibilities to put God in second or last place and to be unfaithful to one's promise.

Paul (2 Cor 2:17) explains that he is not committing adultery with the word of God, is not using it for business but proclaiming it sincerely. In 2 Corinthians 4:2, Paul writes, "Rather, we have renounced shameful, hidden things; not acting deceitfully or falsifying the word of God" (*neque adulterantes*

18. Cf. Monléon, *Instruments*, 33.

verbum Dei). In this sense, the instrument would mean that we use the word of God straightforwardly, honestly, without hoping for advantages for ourselves. This is also true for dealing with the words of others. We can find the allegorical exegesis of this commandment in Cassian,[19] since he lists different kinds of adultery (*adulterium*) according to the spiritual development. This may be superstition (*superstitio pagana*) and legalism but could also mean that one does not fully trust God or focus on Christ, and, finally, it could also be heresy and its more subtle form, when one resorts to useless thoughts and moves away from God.

Perhaps adultery did not seem the greatest danger in Benedict's community but rather homosexuality. This is never directly named but stands behind many regulations (i.e., RB 22; cf. also comments on laughter).

V. 5: not to steal, (*non facere furtum,*)

Benedict names again a fundamental commandment that has validity already in the OT and for all Christians. Paul admonishes: "The thief must no longer steal" (Eph 4:28). Smaragdus (169) indicates that we are God's possession and do not own ourselves. If we let our moods run our lives, then we have stolen from God.

Many thefts have occurred in the history of religious life, small and big. Caesarius names theft in his Rule for Nuns as being instigated by the devil (*diabolo instigante*; 26.2). The third Rule of the Fathers calls theft a "sacrilege" (13). A saying of the Fathers[20] says: "If there is a brother who commits a sin through weakness, one must bear it, but if he steals (and is not stopped even after being reproved) drive him away, for it is hurtful to his soul and troubles all those who live in the neighborhood." Often it is reported that monks procured some sweets or took apples or other fruit. As a monk who made profession, he cannot just take something on his own accord without being guilty before God and the community. Furthermore, careless handling of earthly goods that God gave us for safekeeping is theft from the goods of the poor. Maybe Benedict was aware that even small thefts could severely undermine trust in a community. This could trigger tendencies to protect oneself, to lock everything away; monastics could then no longer leave their cells unconcerned. This kind of climate weighs heavily on the whole community. The religious community is built on mutual trust; it is essential that everyone's honesty and conscientiousness can be relied on. There is much stealing in the area of intellectual ideas. To claim something that I have read or heard someplace else as my own idea is theft too.

19. *Conf.* XIII.8.1-2; and especially XIV.11.2-5.
20. *Alph*, Daniel 6.

V. 6: not to covet; (*non concupiscere,*)

Not all desires are bad; there are also good ones (cf. 4.46). Epicurus is supposed to have said that the joy that was gained through satisfaction of desires is only short lived; one should slowly kill these desires.[21] Christianity is not about killing all desires. *Concupiscentia* can point to something good and can give our efforts vitality and strength. As is shown in the Ten Commandments, coveting here means a desire that strives for illicit goods and things (maybe even human beings). The Master uses this word only with negative meaning, whereas Benedict follows a more biblical parlance as one can have a desire for God, for God's temple, or for wisdom,[22] but desire can lead to sin. The Letter of James (1:14) says that everyone can be tempted by *concupiscentia*. "Then desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death" (Jas 1:15). Paul admonishes in Romans 6:12 that we should not follow our desires and these need to be killed (Col 3:5). The book of Wisdom talks about disciplining desires.[23]

This instrument again applies to all Christians. For monks who have renounced certain goods, this instrument often may have greater force. Fake desires may well up and become more acute because by living in close proximity with each other, they may see many things others have that they would like to own themselves. However, the more we give in, the more the desires will grow until they enslave us and weaken our power to love. God demands our full love (RB 41).

V. 7: not to bear false witness; (*non falsum testimonium dicere,*)

The word *testimonium* refers to trials in court in which a person testifies as a witness. There it is certainly very important that somebody not be judged falsely. Witnessing is also used in RB with this same meaning when Benedict speaks of some monks' "good witness" (21.1), for example, or that the bishop should be called in as a witness (62.9). Certainly we are talking here about important testimony. We should not testify falsely about another. This can then slide into many other forms, such as badmouthing, suspicions, negative criticism, exaggerations, or even untruths. Smaragdus (170) points out that each promise that is made only by words and not followed by actions is like giving false witness. In this sense, we could draw the connection with 4.25, "Never give a hollow greeting of peace." Proverbs 21:28 states: "The false

21. Cf. Monléon, *Instruments*, 39f.

22. Cf. Wis 6:18; 6:37 (Latin); Ps 83/84:3. For *concupiscentia*, cf. Bamberg, "Vitam aeternam."

23. Wis 6:18; cf. Tobit 3:6; Dan 13:8, 56; Deut 5:21.

witness will perish, but one who listens will give lasting testimony." Furthermore, one should consider that we are called to be witnesses of the reign of God (Acts 1:8). If our life is not in accord with this call, we are giving false witness. Sometimes we are lacking courage to give witness.

After these five negative maxims from the Decalogue, a certain culmination follows in the next two instruments in verses 8-9.

V. 8: to honor everyone, (*honorare omnes homines,*)

Here Benedict changes the text of the Master that focuses on the Ten Commandments and uses "you shall honor father and mother" (3.8). It is not clear if the Master refers to a person's biological parents or perhaps the abbot who is supposed to be father and mother (2.31). This particular instrument must be very important since it is placed before the Golden Rule. It is of interest to note that this commandment does not appear at this place in the Decalogue. It is in this spot when Jesus recounts the commandments to the rich young man (Matt 19:18ff.; Luke 18:20). RM thus more closely follows the gospel.

Contrary to monastic history, RM is relatively friendly to the parents of the monks. It is clear that one forsakes one's earthly parents upon entering the monastery (Thp.2) and that the parental home of the candidate will no longer be his home (90.65); yet this is not expressed in a pejorative way. When somebody becomes a monk, he is not exempt from showing basic respect to father and mother.[24]

Honoring (*honorare*) does not just apply to God and Christ (cf. RB 9.7; 63.13), or only to the elders (63.10) but to all. In this case, it is interesting to note that Benedict mentions only showing honor whereas the Master more often emphasizes receiving honor, striving for honor (a total of thirty-four times in RM). Just think of RM 92[25] where the honor of becoming a new abbot is presented as desirable.

All: the parents are certainly included here but the circle is widened just as Christ broadens it: "For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt 12:50). Benedict aligns himself with "honoring everybody" as encouraged in 1 Peter 2:17. Nevertheless, if Benedict wrote it this way, the monks could assume that "everyone" only applies to everyone in the community, similar to what Benedict says at another point: "They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other" (63.17; 72.4; Rom 12:10).

24. Cf. Bozzi 1, 234f.; Borias, "Le moine"; cf. *VitPat* V.4.68; Leloir, "La donna," 134.
25. Especially vv. 39, 43, 51, and 71.

When Benedict adds "all people" (*omnes homines*) he apparently wants to include another circle of persons:[26] concretely, the poor, foreigners, and brothers in the faith, who rely on the monastery in a special way and are being received hospitably by the community. In this way, this instrument is explained in RB 53 and 66. In these chapters, "everyone" is very much emphasized, the respect given to all, regardless of race or social class and the courtesy of respect. In the same way, all in the community should respect each other regardless of whether they were slave or free, with no favoritism (RB 2.20). Every human being has a right to this fundamental respect. Surely, this respect is rooted in the belief that one sees the presence of the Lord in every human being, not just in the community members. In the first chapter of his rule Augustine says, "mutually honoring God in yourselves, whose temples you have become."[27]

What does this mean in practice? We could consider humanness, friendliness, politeness, and decorum. Dorotheus of Gaza thinks if a person does not despise the other then he should also not judge the other. If we do not despise what is little and insignificant then we will not make grave mistakes (*Instr.* VI. 69) Smaragdus (172) adds that respecting all human beings also includes doing what is beneficial to others and being grateful to them.

Respecting every human being, the smallest as well as the most despised ones, is especially important in today's world situation when we ponder wars, hunger, and the possibility to overcome them; social injustice; sexual abuse; and the stance toward the unborn and the elderly.

V. 9: and never do to another what you do not want done to yourself. (*et quod sibi quis fieri non vult, alio ne faciat.*)

The Golden Rule concludes this sequence of instruments in verses 3-9 providing a good basic principle. However, this can also refer back to verse 2, "loving your neighbor as yourself." The Golden Rule is mentioned two more times in RB. The abbot should not accept anyone from another monastery without consulting with this monk's abbot, because it is written, "never do to another what you do not want done to yourself" (61.14). This same saying is used in RB 70.7 as rationale not to be tempted to show anger toward the children.[28] Tobit passes these maxims on to his son (Tobit 4:16). The next verse (4:17) stresses that the young Tobiah has to share his bread with the poor and to clothe the naked (cf. also 4:14f.).

26. Cf. Vogüé, "Honorer," 129–31.

27. *Praec* 1.8, which also hints at 1 Cor 3:16-17.

28. In RB 4 this maxim is only mentioned in the third person, while it is in second person in the original text.

The *Didache* combined the Golden Rule with the main commandment.[29] Cyprian also connects the main commandment with the Golden Rule but in a positive way.[30] Jesus uses the expression in the positive form in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets."[31] The Golden Rule is based on the belief that all human beings have the same rights and that we should not apply double standards as we are easily prone to do. The Golden Rule is quite applicable to our behavior. The impulse to judge somebody is tempting—but I do not want others to do it to me. We are tempted to deceive somebody—but no, I do not want to be treated like that. This is also true for the small things in the monastery's everyday life as well as for activities outside and interactions with all people.

V. 10: Deny yourself to follow Christ,
V. 11: discipline your body,
V. 12: do not give in to temptations,
V. 13: love fasting,
V. 14: relieve the lot of the poor,
V. 15: clothe the naked,
V. 16: visit the sick,
V. 17: and bury the dead.
V. 18: Help the troubled,
V. 19: console the sorrowing.
V. 20: Act differently than the world;
V. 21: the love of Christ must come before all else.

A new segment starts with verse 10 that now focuses on the love of neighbor and is used according to the New Testament. The first verse is setting the tone: this is about turning away from—and turning toward—Christ. Thus, three instruments follow that have a negative connotation; for example, to discipline one's body, not to pamper oneself, and to love fasting (which is a sacrifice). It appears to me that these three are preconditions to enable the next six instruments, which are expressed in a positive way. These six are works of corporal and spiritual mercy. The concluding verses 20-21 are almost parallel to verse 10 and form a bridge to the next paragraph. With verse 20, the negative is again condensed as "the world's way" to which we should become strangers followed by the positive perspective: to prefer nothing to the love of Christ. (Again, Christ is mentioned explicitly!) Verses 20-21 can shed a distinctive light on the works of mercy.

29. *Didache* 1–2.
30. *De dom. or.* 28.
31. Matt 7:12; cf. Luke 6:31.

V. 10: Deny yourself to follow Christ, (*Abnegare semetipsum sibi ut sequatur Christum.*)

Part of this instrument consists of a negative formulation, "renouncing yourself"; it is, however, followed by Latin "*ut*": so that one will follow Christ, or in order to follow Christ. It is not about self-denial per se since it flows out of the positive goal, the imitation of Christ. Even practices of renunciation have legitimacy only in connection with the imitation of Christ or love. Conversely, to follow Christ wholeheartedly is possible only if we are prepared to discipline ourselves and to forego something that would be detrimental to following him. Matthew 7:21 highlights that we enter the reign of God through the narrow gate. This verse shows similarities with the statements in the chapter on obedience: to leave one's own will behind in order to follow Christ who came to fulfill the Father's will (5.13).

Verse 10 is also explained with the two instruments in verses 20-21: "To act differently than the world; to prefer nothing to the love of Christ." One is a precondition for the other. We could look at the entire monastic history under this header: commitment to Christ that requires rejection of riches, of the "world," and, finally, of oneself.[32] Basil explains that one should renounce everything that is detrimental to following Christ, like habits, amusement, relatives, and oneself.[33] This quote is taken from Matthew 16:24 but was shortened: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (followed by, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, whoever loses his life for my sake, will gain it"). Smaragdus (174) interprets the imitation of Christ in a similar way: "To bestow a favor on the ungrateful, not to repay the ill-willed according to their deserts and pray for one's enemies; to love the good, have mercy on the perverse, attract the adversaries, and in charity support the converted; and to endure with equanimity those who are somewhat deceitful and the proud."

Deny yourself. The Latin *sibi* (subsumed in "yourself") is an intensification that Benedict adds to the Bible and to the text of the Master (most likely this is influenced by the *Passio Iuliani*; and possibly from an African reading of Matt 16:24). Thereby, he accentuates an interior renunciation. Should a person say "no" to him- or herself? Verse 2 presupposes that a person usually loves him- or herself and from there takes the measure for charity. As the next three instruments speak of mortification, abstinence from anything that provides pleasure, and fasting, we could legitimately think of physical discipline; but this is certainly not enough since the desires and inclinations

32. Cf. Böckmann, "Openness to the World" and "Xeniteia."
33. *Reg* 4.2.

stem from much deeper roots. Verses 14-19 provide some help for interpretation: What hinders us to show such mercy and love? What hinders us to authentically follow Christ? The hindrances might be due to material things but are sometimes found in self-will, navel-gazing, egotism, and greed. According to monastic tradition, we begin with material renunciation like wealth or family; then our aim is to tear the dependence on things and certain relationships out of our heart. The next step is to have God purify our heart, to renounce everything that could hinder our love of God, and, finally, to renounce our egotistic I. Smaragdus (173) thinks this instrument could be interpreted as follows: to take off the old person, to put on the new one, or to deny the external person and to let the internal one grow.

To follow Christ. Again and again, the instruments offer a counterbalance to an egotistic stance, either love of neighbor or the relationship to Christ, to God. To follow Christ! The word "Christ" appears here in this chapter for the first time. Unlike RM, Benedict uses "Christ" and not "Jesus" since he thinks of the glorified Lord at the same time. There is a similar expression in the Prologue, "that he may never become the angry father who disinherits his sons because we did not want to follow him into glory" (Prol.6f.). Following Christ is expressed explicitly only at this point in RB. The word *sequi* (to follow) is emphasized strongly at significant passages; it means following or walking the journey. One is to seek peace and follow it (Prol.17). In Smaragdus' interpretation, Christ is peace; thus, seeking peace and following it is following Christ (85).

We need to follow the Rule as our teacher, as *magistra*,[34] and not the will of our own heart (3.7-8). By our actions we follow the voice of the one who commands (5.8). These last two passages show that Benedict primarily underscores obedience. Eventually, we follow what we deem useful for others (72.7). Twice we are being pointed toward following Christ in a concrete community: through seeking peace and being focused on the well-being of the other through selfless love. For Benedict, this is a concrete way of following Christ. The monks are no longer able to follow Jesus' footsteps directly as the disciples did. After Easter, the following of Christ is being translated physically, e.g., by suffering persecution for Christ. For the monks this takes mainly the form of obedience in community. In all this it is clear that our selfish ego needs to die (cf. John 12:24).

Verses 11-13 seem to form a unit as a prelude to the following instruments of the works of mercy. What we are able to deny ourselves, we can give to the poor.[35]

34. For an explanation of this term, cf. *Listening Community*, 95.
35. Cf. Vogüé, *Ce que dit*, 54f.

V. 11: discipline your body, (*Corpus castigare,*)

This is quoted from Paul in reference to disciplining the body to participate in a race (1 Cor 9:27). The end is not to inflict suffering on the body, but the body needs to be strengthened to serve a higher goal. On the other hand, Benedict does not take over the Master's term, "to chastise the body for the soul." Possibly he wanted to avoid the impression of dualism as it is present in RM. Benedict evidences an understanding of human beings that is more biblical and therefore more holistic. *Castigare* sounds like a severe word: its origins are *castum-ago* meaning chaste, purifying or disciplining, rebuking, improving, restraining. *Castus* has two meanings, something that is disciplined as well as something that is pure. Both meanings seem to converge here and interpretation flows from this view: dying to the vices and sins (Smaragdus 174); to discipline the body but neither to abuse nor soften it; rather to train it with real discretion, sacrifice, and asceticism; discipline it so that it will make us ready and sustain us for the reign of God. It is more important to stick with the discipline than taking on big projects only to quit after a short time. Monléon[36] talks about the contrast with this instrument by summoning an amusing story of St. Theresa of Avila, "On one day, we are not going to choir because we have a headache, neither the next day because we had a headache previously, and not the third day since we are afraid we could have a headache again."

V. 12: do not give in to temptations, (*delicias non amplecti,*)

This tool stands between verses 11 and 13 indicating that the pleasures are food related. RM uses the term in this sense (cf. RM 53.24; 90.21). RB has the term only in this verse. The Bible uses it in both positive and negative ways. Wisdom "delights" in the human being (Prov 8:31), we may enjoy the light at night (Ps 138/139:11), but she also points to the pleasures of sin (Sir 27:14). God does not prescribe a joyless life but allows for pleasures. *Delicium* is synonymous with *voluptas, libido*, and it derives from *licio* (*lacesco*) (*lax*)—seduction, to captivate, to seduce.[37] The Master asserts that we should flee pleasures, but Benedict more correctly admonishes us not to embrace them or getting stuck with them. Pleasures are to instill joy and gratitude toward God but are not to enslave us. There are various pleasures: material, mental, and spiritual. Even to solace and pleasure experienced in prayer we should not hold on; in this way, we will always be open for the highest joy, which is God.

36. Monléon, *Instruments*, 64. The author could not verify this quote.
37. Ernout and Meillet, *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue Latine*, regarding *lax*.

V. 13: love fasting, (*ieiunium amare.*)

Benedict uses a similar form also in 4.64, "to love chastity" (*castitatem amare*). Both instruments belong together. Vogüé is the primary proponent of the importance of fasting for monks. By using the verb "to love" Benedict expresses that we should not take on fasting as duty but accept and embrace it willingly. He uses the word *amare* ("to love") four times in this chapter (*odire*, "to hate," twice). This use of the verb "to love" is to point out that the fulfilling of laws in the Christian-monastic life is not the focal point but an interior stance and engagement.[38] The oldest RB commentary (Smaragdus 177) states that there are many who fast but they do not love fasting: they take it as a duty. That is why they check the clock or the progression of the sun to see if the time to eat again has come. In this way, fasting cannot act as a medicine; correctly used, it is a good medicine; the passions diminish, prayer more easily reaches heaven, the gift of contrition is given, and the human being will become more spiritual. For the monks Benedict allows for two meals a day or one in the afternoon or evening (cf. RB 41). Generally, in RB, the word *ieiunium* means postponing a meal to a later time (afternoon or evening), and not to eat or drink beforehand. Vogüé shows that it is possible to live this direction, especially in the context of practicing silence.

Work or communal life often cause us to give up fasting, especially in situations in which we need to interact and spend a lot of energy. Vogüé thinks that fasting takes sufficient motivation, recollection, and gradual adaptation. Fasting could train us to control ourselves and turn into a source of joy for us.[39] Vogüé does not stress the social aspect as much as Benedict, who mentions relieving the fate of the poor right in the next verse. Fasting could be inspirational to many people today as a gesture of solidarity with the hungry. In fact, many fasting people report that they feel deeply united with all the poor. Fasting uncovers in us the greater hunger for God. Surely, fasting was first related to physical fasting but already early on *ieiunium* was used in a broader sense (cf. liturgy). What kind of fasting is relevant for us?

The major prophets strongly emphasize that correct fasting is not just consigned to abstinence and mortification but is expressed in love for the poor: "This is the manner of fasting I would choose . . . To bow one's head . . . and lie upon sackcloth and ashes. . . . Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bring the afflicted and the homeless into your house;

38. Cf. Puzicha, 106; Kardong, 84.

39. Cf. Vogüé, "Aimer" ("To Love Fasting"); "Autour" ("On Regular Fasting").

loathing the naked when you see them?" (Isa 58:5-7). It is an interesting endeavor to compare this Isaiah passage with RB 4.10-19.

Verses 14-19: The expression "relieving the lot of the poor" opens a new sequence that is inspired by Matthew 25 and summarizes the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The poor are grouped together with the naked, the sick, those in distress, and the grieving. It is a worthwhile question whether we could view verses 14-19 as the main content of verse 20 ("Your way of acting should be different from the world's way") and, further, whether verses 14-19 express verse 21, to prefer nothing to the love of Christ.[40] The Master added to the corporal works of mercy: "to lend money, to give to the needy." It is apparent why Benedict omits this. Moreover, he could have viewed the last instrument as a repetition of verse 14 (cf. a similar omission of Ths.30).

In the various manuscripts, we can sense that the change from plural to singular has been found bothersome. Consequently, some have adopted the singular, others the plural; the original reading, however, is that the plural is used for the poor, and the singular for the other groups of persons. Could this be a clue that the poor are generally in the majority? Or, as indicated above, that the poor are seen as generic for all the other groups?

V. 14: relieve the lot of the poor, (*Pauperes recreare,*)

The plural corresponds with the direct source, the *Passio Iuliani: cura pauperum—indigens, nudus*. The word "poor" appears for the first time in RB at this point. We should relieve the poor, serve and feed them, *recreare* (RB Hapax). Taken literally, it means to create again, revive; furthermore, to strengthen, to refresh, and in liturgical language to renew, e.g., through the Eucharist. RM uses the word for the wellspring of baptism through which we are born again (Th.13). At other times in RM it is used in connection with the brothers. It certainly includes a hearty meal and everything needed so that they can recover and renew their strength. Two RB texts explain this instrument: "Particularly diligent care and concern is to be shown in welcoming the poor and strangers because in them Christ is received even more particularly" (53.15) and that the cellarer is to show every care and concern for the poor (31.9). Therefore, we may well assume that verse 14 not only focuses on the category of alms giving but also embraces a holistic concern based on listening and empathy (cf. 66.3f.). The *Passio Iuliani*, which probably served as source for our rules, states in one passage that we should eagerly care for the poor through fasting so that others could be refreshed.[41]

40. Cf. Böckmann, "Arme," 189; *Around the Monastic Table*, 95.
41. *Passio Iuliani* n. 46; cf. also Isa 58:6f.

This is something we do for Christ who is present in the poor. It is also an emulation, imitation of Christ, acting as he did.

Most likely, this verse means the poor outside the monastery (that is how the word "poor" is always used in RB). The community needs to ask itself: Who are the poor ones who need new life? Presumably, these are not only Christians but in general all the poor who need us.

V. 15: clothe the naked, (*nudum vestire,*)

This and the following instruments are in the singular, which most likely does not mean that there are only a few people of this kind; rather, this is a collective singular. According to RB 55.9, the wardrobe held clothes for the poor. Great numbers of poor people and strangers must have come to Monte Cassino. There is a story of Lucullus who had to lend one hundred coats for a feast. There were five hundred coats in his wardrobe! A contemporary example would be three thousand pairs of shoes of Imelda Marcos (Philippines).

Take this instrument also in the figurative sense: "You claim, 'I am rich and affluent, I want for nothing.' You do not realize that it is you who is wretched and miserable, poor, blind and naked" (*nudus*; Rev 3:17). Alternatively, somebody did something wrong. This instrument is not about covering everything with the mantle of mercy but acting with discretion. Not everything needs to be exposed but only the absolute necessary while other things are being "covered" and protected so that the person can retain her dignity. This does not mean covering up or overlooking (cf. the scandal of sexual misconduct).

V. 16: visit the sick, (*infirmum visitatre,*)

This verse is taken directly from Matthew 25:36, like the one in the last instrument. Sirach 7:32-35 (Vulg 36-39) can be used as background for this and the surrounding verses: "To the poor also extend your hand, that your blessing may be complete. Give your gift to all the living, and do not withhold your kindness from the dead. Do not avoid those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. Do not hesitate to visit the sick, because for such things you will be loved." In RB 36.1-2, Benedict quotes Matthew 25:36 directly: "The sick must be cared for before and above all else, for it is truly Christ who is served in them. Because he himself said: *I was sick and you visited me*." Yet for Benedict merely visiting the sick is not sufficient, as it seems to be for RM (cf. RM 69–70). Benedict is more concerned with caring and loving service to these preferred members of the community.

Historically, service to the sick and visiting them has been greatly valued in monasticism.[42] "A brother asked a wise monk: 'I know two brothers, of

42. Böckmann, "Von den kranken Brüdern"; *Around the Monastic Table*, 133–35.

whom one remains quiet in his cell for six days without interruptions, fasting and putting hard labor on himself. The other one, however, serves the sick. Which of the two pleases God more?' The old wise monk responded, 'Even if the one who fasts for six days would also hang himself by his nose, he would still not be equal to the one who serves the sick.'"[43] In monastic history, monasteries have ministered to the sick, practiced healing arts, and started organizations that served the sick and their needs.[44]

We cannot practice this instrument with the materially sick only. Benedict uses the word *infirmus* (sick) also for those weak in character and even for sinning brothers. Therefore, it is especially important not to break contact to those who are weak in this sense but to meet them where they are (*visitare*).

V. 17: and bury the dead. (*mortuum sepelire.*)

As background we may think of Tobit who risks everything to bury the dead (Tobit 1:17; 2:7, 9). Nowadays, Christian burial is planned and organized by organizations. Often we escort the deceased and in doing so honor the body of the person who comes from God. He is put into the soil like a seed (cf. 1 Cor 15:42-46). It is reported of a disciple of Abba Copres that he was very concerned with burying Christians wherever they died. And so it was Copres himself who lovingly buried his student.[45] It is known about Abbot Odilo of Cluny that he concerned himself especially with the care of the dead.[46]

V. 18: Help the troubled, (*In tribulatione subvenire,*)

This instrument seems to be similar to the next one. It can be practiced with people within or outside the community. What people are meant in verse 18? The root word for *tribulatio* signifies a threshing vehicle. The word can suggest torture, misfortune, sorrow, tribulation. It appears again in the fourth step of humility: "You placed tribulations on our backs" (7.40). The human being is in a tight spot, under a great burden, feels blows and bites, torn and overcome by fear. James 1:27 sees helping such people as true religion: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows [Vulg: *visitare*] in their affliction [*angustia/tribulatione*]."

Literally, the expression "to come to help" (*subvenire*; Hapax) means coming from below. This is a fitting image for what we can do if somebody

43. *VitPat* V.17.18; Teresa of Avila supposedly said, "Believe me that on the day you lack the sick, you will lack everything." (Quoted from Monléon, *Instruments*, 88.)

44. Crislip, *Monastery*; the entire book is worth reading in this regard.

45. *HistMon* 9.3-5.

46. Third antiphon of the Feast of the Holy Abbots of Cluny, *Antiphonale monasticum* (Paris, 1934), 875.

experiences such tribulations (Isa 1:17). We can assist them but not as if we mastered and knew everything in a superior way, but in a humble and sensitive way, from below. Of course, we can do many things naturally and unnoticed, without much to-do.

V. 19: console the sorrowing. (*dolentem consolari.*)

Here, the interior sorrow is also addressed. Benedict uses "to console" very often. Consoling does not just mean to speak words of comfort but also to sit with somebody silently or it can be expressed in actions or in words. For Benedict, this is a special trait of communal life that the members can experience consolation from each other (RB 1.5). The abbot is to send *senpectae* (wise monks) to the excommunicated members to comfort them and motivate them to convert and to console them so as to prevent their sliding into great sadness (27.3). Consoling (*consolari*) builds up; it leads to a positive end, conversion, and prevents deep sadness or depression, which can grow into despair. Consolation can also take place in actions. Those who extend their help to weak brothers are called comforters (*solacia*). God, who helped and comforted the brothers while serving in the kitchen (*consulatus est*), surely did not just do this with words but became new strength for the brothers (35.16).[47]

After these sentences, Benedict omits two maxims from RM: "To lend money, to give to the needy." In the same way, Benedict leaves out the explanation of Psalm 14 from RM (Ths.30), "who does not give money to usury and not accept bribes against the innocent." Presumably, Benedict determined that these expressions do not apply to his community since not everybody could lend something or give away money. The latter was prohibited explicitly. The monk, in professing obedience, gives away his right to make decisions about himself or things (cf. RB 33, 54, 58.24f.).

Verses 20-21 belong together and can lead, on the one hand, to the principles from the Sermon on the Mount, which they contain, and, on the other, make clear that the corporal and spiritual works of mercy cannot be exercised without these principles. Verse 20 talks about the turning away from the world's way and verse 21 about commitment to Christ.

V. 20: Act differently than the world; (*Saeculi actibus se facere alienum,*)

This verse deals with negation of the world's behavior, its actions, buzz, habits, customs. "World" here does not signify the created world as a whole in contrast to the uncreated God but rather the "world" as society, infected by sin. Expressed concretely, it denotes egoism, striving for power, possessions

47. Cf. 2 Cor 5:4; 1 Thess 5:14.

(wealth), and lust without considering the needs of others. We should become strangers to these actions. This was true at Benedict's times as well as today.[48]

It should be obvious that the entire monastic tradition of *xeniteia*—living as a stranger in a foreign land—plays a role here. The monk moves away like Abraham, leaving his family and home and also his country. He becomes a foreigner especially to his attachments. Outwardly, he goes into the desert or the monastery; inwardly he detaches from sins and vices until he lets himself be formed more and more by Christ (4.21). Paul admonishes the Romans: "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2).

V. 21: the love of Christ must come before all else. (*nihil amori Christi praeponere.*)

In recalling Cyprian,[49] we can expound: Christ himself has preferred nothing to us, therefore a total response is reasonable. The *Passio Iuliani* connected self-denial and the imitation of Christ with this instrument (n. 46). If we view the connection of this verse to the chapter, we receive an answer to the question, "what may we prefer?" The rich to the poor, the healthy to the sick, the hilarious to the sufferer; is this not a way to prefer some other thing to the love of Christ? Considering the next verse, we could say: "I may prefer anger, falsehood, and revenge to Christ."

Verses 20-21 echo the gospel: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt 10:37). They also echo RB 4.1-2: "to love God with your whole heart, whole soul, and all your strength." This same sentence appears again in similar form at the end of the Rule but in a more radical form: "to prefer nothing whatever to Christ" (72.11). We could say that the monastic life is supposed to lead us to an ever more radical imitation of the love of Christ. Verses 72.11-12 also make clear that this love of Christ causes us to run together toward the goal of community. Surely, we will see this instrument in connection with one of the concretizations of this love, "preferring nothing to the work of God" (43.3).

Love of Christ (*amor Christi*), this could be our love for Christ, which is contrary to the love of pleasures, gluttony, and the egotistic self, and goes together with love of the poor, the naked, the sorrowing. We can also understand this expression as the love that Christ has for us (*genitivus subjectivus*). The emphasis would then be on letting oneself be drawn by the love

48. Cf. Böckmann, "Xeniteia"; the word *alienus* (foreign) with this strong emphasis appears only here in RB (*hapax*).

49. *De dom. or.* 15: *Christo nihil omnino praeponere quia nec nobis quicquam ille praeposuit.*

of Christ, to expose oneself to it totally and to let it flow out to all the poor and mistreated.

A text from the *Life of Antony* (14.6)—though not a source for RB—can also illuminate this verse. There we read that God gave Antony the kindness of speech, "and so he comforted many who mourned; he reconciled others who quarreled with each other so that they would be friends; but he urged everyone to prefer nothing in the world to the love of Christ. In his instructions, he also counseled to remember the future gifts and the loving kindness that God has given us, 'who did not spare his own son but gave him for the many'" (*VitAnt* 14.6).

In verses 22-33 some instruments follow that refer to realities which are contrary to the love of Christ (and, therefore, of human beings): acting in anger, planning revenge, holding deceitfulness in the heart, and giving false peace. These instruments are influenced mainly by three Scripture passages:

Matt 5	1 Pet 3:9	1 Cor 4:12	RB 4
22-23 on anger			22-23
27-32 on adultery			
33-37 on oath			27-28
38-42 on enduring	not repaying evil with		
injustice	evil		29/30
43-47 love of			31
enemies			
bless those who curse	not cursing those who	they curse us	32
	curse but blessing	we bless	
	them	they persecute	
		we endure	33

Vices like anger, malice, hypocrisy, perjury, injustice, hostility, and persecution are mentioned (cf. RB 7.35-43). In such situations, we would surmise that we could not stay in such an environment, if we want to imitate Christ, as stated in verse 10. Apparently, such a situation is not opposed to this statement. On the contrary! The positive characteristics of the imitation of Christ that prove their value precisely here are love, truthfulness, justice, reconciliation, blessing, and patience.

V. 22: You are not to act in anger,
V. 23: not to nurse a grudge,
V. 24: not to entertain deceitfulness in your heart,
V. 25: not to give a false greeting of peace,
V. 26: not to turn away from love,
V. 27: not to swear so as not to swear a false oath,
V. 28: to speak the truth with heart and tongue.

V. 22: You are not to act in anger, (*Iram non perficere,*)

The next two instruments belong together; they pertain to *ira* and *iracundia*. *Ira* appears only here in RB. It is opposed to mercy and peace; it goes together with dispute and vice. Benedict speaks later of an older person who can be angry (71.7; *iratus*). He views it as a sickness that can be healed through the humility of the younger and the blessing that the senior eventually gives. According to Jerome, anger is innate in human beings but it is unique to Christians not to carry out this anger. In the love of Christ, we Christians have the power to defeat the upsurge of anger.[50] The old Latin translation of Psalm 4 read, *irascimini et nolite peccare* ("be angry and do not sin"). Ephesians 4:26 took this over too. Apparently, Benedict depended on his source, the *Passio Iuliani*, which says not to turn anger into action, not to recompense evil with evil, and that the time of resentment should not last (n. 46).

Cassian thinks that we should not let *ira* and *iracundia* enter; they are only justified if these emotions are aimed against ourselves; otherwise, we should eradicate them with their roots.[51] Benedict's approach is somewhat milder. We should not put anger into action and foster it. The emotions of fury, anger and resentment well up in us. We need to decide if we want to give them free rein or to work through them, channeling them in an appropriate way, e.g., with creative work, with prayer, etc. Scripture says, "for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God" (Jas 1:20). Admittedly, there is also justified anger, which Jesus showed, for example, when he saw the temple defiled (John 2:17; Ps 68/69:10). Also, our two rules speak of Christ's justified anger, namely, of the father who disowned his rebellious sons and servants (Prol.6; Ths.3).

50. Ep. 79.9.

51. The entire chapter of *Inst.* VIII is about *ira*, cf. especially VIII.7, 11, and 20; cf. also *Conf.* XVI.7.

V. 23: not to nurse a grudge, (*iracundiae tempus non reservare.*)

We reserve something, keep and pamper it. This grudge has its own dynamic that grows the more we cultivate it. A saying by the abbas says: "The one who wants to hide malice in the memory of his soul is like the one who hides fire in the hay."[52] That is why it is wise to seek reconciliation before sunset (cf. below). Vengeance belongs to God and it is not we who should take revenge. Sirach (28:1-5) explains: "The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail. Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven. Should a man nourish anger against his fellows and expect healing from the Lord? Should a man refuse mercy to his fellows, yet seek pardon for his own sins? If he who is but flesh cherishes wrath, who will forgive him?" *Iracundia* means passion, fervor, fire. Cassian also mentions that a person wants to hide it in his heart, and there it continues to simmer and wreak havoc. He also offers an explanation for the sequence that we see in RB 4.20-24. Just as we prefer nothing to love, we should avoid nothing more than the anger of resentment.[53] Despite his dependence on Cassian, Benedict is more balanced in his expressions, "not to make it last" and "not to turn into action."

V. 24: not to entertain deceitfulness in your heart, (*Dolum in corde non tenere,*)

There is no claim here that there should be no falsehood since it could be that temptations arise, but we should not cherish and cultivate them in our hearts. *Dolus* applies to any dichotomy, duplicity, lie, and lack of unity, simplicity and directness. Smaragdus (189) says: "The more hidden this vice is in the heart, the greater does it grow in malice; but when it is brought out in the open it is reduced to naught and healed." The best way to heal it is through mutual love. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit, which lives in us; thus, there should be no space for this malice. Benedict warned against it twice in the Prologue in his explanation of Psalm 33/34. First, in Prol.17: "keep your tongue from vicious talk" (the search for peace then appears in the same verse, cf. also the next instrument). And then in Prol.26: "who speaks the truth from the heart and has not practiced deceit with the tongue." The book of Proverbs states: "Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil, but those who counsel peace have joy" (12:2).

V. 25: not to give a false greeting of peace, (*pacem falsam non dare.*)

Peace can designate the sign of peace or a gesture of reconciliation (RB uses both dimensions and a more generic meaning of peace). In Benedictine

52. *VitPat* VI.4.25.
53. Cassian, *Conf.* XVI.22.2.

communities, there are rituals of peace and reconciliation, e.g., during liturgy (63.4). The Lord's Prayer also fulfills this function at the end of vespers (13.12-14). Reconciliation should occur before sunset (4.73). Malice and lying are especially bad if a person pretends having reconciled but in her or his heart still nurtures anger and evil thoughts against the other. The Master was well aware that it is difficult to put this instrument into action. Therefore, he writes, "not to make a consciously feigned peace" (RM 3.27).

Benedict simplified and radicalized. Behind charming behavior, evil aggression can be hidden. Should we be authentic in our hearts and with our whole person? Maybe the emotions will not follow immediately but the honest motivation to forgive is the prerequisite for the kiss of peace. Otherwise, we are just like Judas who betrayed Jesus with a kiss, as Smaragdus shows (190). Psalm 27/28:3 says: "They speak peace to their neighbors though evil is in their hearts." We want to live in peace with our neighbor but the sign of peace should not be given lightly.[54] Prol.17 reminds us to seek peace and to let it be our quest and aim. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt 5:9). The more we are in Christ—and Christ is peace—the more will we be able to extend real peace.

The Master had the following instruments after this one, which Benedict did not adopt: "To keep faith with a confrere, not to love detraction, to do what has been promised and not to deceive" (3.28-30). Benedict shortened and placed the second instrument of not defaming at another place (4.40) and radicalized it.

V. 26: not to turn away from love, (*Caritatem non derelinquere.*)

As in other passages of RB, love (*caritas*) refers to love of neighbor (cf., e.g., 27.4; 35.6; 65.11). Apparently, the authors of our rules are aware how we are constantly tempted to abandon love just as we distance ourselves from God, the source of all love. When are we in danger to abandon love? Benedict is probably thinking of situations when we experience disappointment or insult or if our love is not reciprocated. First Corinthians 13:4-7 asserts: "Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." In Romans 8:35 Paul says: "What will separate us from the love of Christ?"

When Benedict talks about the behavior toward the excommunicated, the challenging, sinful members, he admonishes that love for them should be reaffirmed (27.4). In such situations we can show whether we hold on

54. Cyprian, *De dom. or.* 15; idem, *Ep.* 59.13.

to love. Love becomes stronger in the service to our neighbors (35.2, 6; cf. Prol.47); it is called "fraternal love" and is supposed to be shown selflessly (72.8). Even the abbot shows this charity to his monks, and the monks can love their abbot with upright and humble love (72.10). In a difficult case, even obedience can be given out of love (RB 68.5). Love also comes into play in interactions with people on the outside to whom the "fervor of love" also applies (cf. 66.4). Finally, peace and love are named as goal of the community (65.11). Curiously in RB 4, *caritas* is imaged as a person whom we should not desert. We recall a similar expression in 7.67. The monk arrives at the love of God, the *caritas* that stems from God and is God.

V. 27: not to swear so as not to swear a false oath, (*Non iurare ne forte periuret,*)

Benedict changes the text of the Master here also, which stated, "not loving to swear," which means not to get used to swearing. Again, Benedict is more radical and draws from the Sermon on the Mount: "Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.' But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one" (Matt 5:33-37). The Old Testament underscores that the oath should be truthful, e.g., Deuteronomy 6:13: "By his name shall you swear." Wisdom 14:28-30 warns: "For they either go mad with enjoyment, or prophesy lies, or live lawlessly or lightly perjure themselves. For as their trust is in lifeless idols, they expect no harm when they have sworn falsely . . . because they thought perversely of God by devoting themselves to idols, and because they deliberately swore false oaths, despising piety."

Whoever thoughtlessly swears an oath, which means to call upon God as a witness, and takes it lightly, could easily make this a habit and slide into deceitfulness and even perjury. Sirach 23:9 states that those who make oaths often are filled with malice. We read in some of the Fathers like Cyprian and Augustine[55] that swearing an oath is forbidden due to this danger, others are more careful. If we call often on God as guarantor of the truthfulness of a statement, we can encounter the danger of perjury. Even Ambrose states: "Do not swear oaths so that you do not start making false oaths."[56] Nowadays, we distinguish more between a solemn oath and its possible misuse. The good oath gives witness that God is the source of all truth. The profession formula is also such a sacred oath before God and the saints. Consequently, we should not profane this oath and use it at all occasions.

55. Cyprian, *Testim II*. 12; Augustine, *Ep.* 157.40 is very close to this text.
56. Ambrose, *ExhortVg* 74.

V. 28: to speak the truth with heart and tongue. (*veritatem ex corde et ore proferre.*)

This is the last instrument of this series: Heart and voice (mouth) should be in harmony (cf. RB 19.7). Once again, we can hear echoes of the Sermon on the Mount: "Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No'" (Matt 5:37). Initially, it starts in the heart (cf. also v. 24). Heart and mouth are seen together. Prol.17 and 26 admonish to speak the truth in the heart. Human beings do not want to appear better than they really are. They have the courage to opt for the truth even if it is humiliating. According to Monléon, the awareness of being sinful is the best precondition for truth.[57] We pray in Psalm 50/51:8, "Behold, you desire true sincerity; and secretly you teach me wisdom" (*PsRom*).

The opposite also begins in the heart. We can deceive ourselves. Dorotheus of Gaza thinks that there are three different kinds of lies: in thoughts, through word, or through life. The one sinning in thoughts is the one who records suspicions and cherishes them. The one sinning through words is the one who instead of saying, "I would like to have this," says, "Since I am suffering from these maladies, I need this," or, "I was prescribed this."[58] And he will lie until he satisfies his wants. Psalm 54/55:22 expresses lying strongly: "Softer than butter is his speech, but war is in his heart." Jesus stresses the accordance of heart and word: "For from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. A good person brings forth good out of a store of goodness, but an evil person brings forth evil out of a store of evil" (Matt 12:34f.). Similarly, our lives should harmonize with the good and truthful words. Such a person also has the courage to vouch for the truth. The one who speaks the truth in his heart, may dwell in God's house (cf. Ps 14/15; Prol.22 and 6).

The next five verses form a certain unity.

Vv. 29-33:

A V. 29: Do not repay evil with evil.
B V. 30: Do not injure anyone,
but bear patiently injuries done to you.
C V. 31: Love your enemies.
B' V. 32: If people curse you, do not curse them back
but bless them instead.
A' V. 33: Endure persecution for the sake of justice.

These verses echo the fourth step of humility (7.35-43). There the monk encounters hard and adverse things, injustice, fire, trouble, exposure to death,

57. Monléon, *Instruments*, 49.
58. Dorotheus of Gaza, *Instr* IX.97-103.

snares, pressing burdens, and all kinds of unfairness; the monk is being hit on one cheek, robbed of the garment; there are false brothers, and he is exposed to swearing, even persecution.[59] We do not deal with evil on the same level as with adversity; we overcome it by doing good positively. This denotes progress with regard to the previous instruments. The community presents a very pitiful reality. The monks were not disheartened to join such communities or to persevere in them. They viewed it as a challenge to take the imitation of Christ and the Beatitudes seriously. In this way, they could fulfill the Sermon on the Mount.

This paragraph has a kind of a chiastic structure: A and B as well as A' and B' speak of evil and overcoming it with good, whereas in Latin B and B' first state what not to do and then continue with an empathic but (*sed*). Both show the negative possibility and then point out positively what counteracts this evil. Thus we find in the center a simply worded instrument (C) that in reality contains the fundamental and radical attitude of loving our enemies.

V. 29: Do not repay evil with evil. (*Malum pro malo non reddere.*)

This verse could also be a header for the next instrument, the *Passio Iuliani* is a source for this verse.[60] Jerome and Cyprian[61] refer to the biblical commandment and view it as a realization of the imitation of Christ. While the Sermon on the Mount directly admonishes not to withstand evil (Matt 5:39), the early Christian letters emphasize not to repay evil with evil (1 Pet 3:9; Rom 12:21). The vicious cycle of evil cannot be broken by paying back in kind but only by doing good. Surely, we cannot attain such heights of virtue immediately, and it is important to move through several stages to master these situations appropriately without jumping too fast to the highest level of heroism just to fall down again eventually. Above all, God's grace is always accessible. Jesus is the great role model who repaid evil only with good. Benedict and his sources believe that in the monastic community we can practice the same heroic virtues as the martyrs. He does not want us to spot the evil only in others and to view ourselves as victims. Consequently, after the fourth step of humility where we experience evil from the outside, the fifth step of humility follows on which we acknowledge the evil within ourselves. We are all infected by sin.

59. In my opinion this last verse is authentic (cf. RB 7) though it is not found in all manuscripts; cf. Hanslik, 52.

60. N. 46, p. 49. The *Passio Iuliani* also mentioned the images in RB 4.22 and 23.

61. Jerome, *Ep.* 84.1 and Cyprian, *De bono pat* 16.

V. 30: Do not injure anyone, but bear patiently injuries done to you. (*Iniuriam non facere, sed et factas patienter sufferre.*)

Iniuria signifies everything that is not happening according to law and includes insults in particular. It applies to every expression that violates our honor. In Latin it can mean every act that is directed against the rights of others. While the Master uses the word "injustice" in the plural, Benedict uses the singular of the word though it interrupts the flow of logic in the sentence.[62] We should not commit any kind of injustice at any time nor utter insults (singular in RB) but endure everything patiently. Apparently the monk is exposed to many insults. Imitation of Jesus also means giving up rights and privileges and to bear insults just as he did. Monléon points out that Mark 16:18 says: "If they . . . drink deadly poison, it will not harm them."[63] Insults are like a poisonous drink that cannot harm us but kills our pride. We read in Exodus 14:14: "The Lord will fight for you; you have only to keep still." We entrust God with our cause. Augustine employs the image of the grape that is pressed in the winepress.[64] In his commentary on the Lord's Prayer and the petition, "Your will be done," Cyprian explains that we should not voice insults but tolerate those addressed to us (15). Cassian also describes it as the fifth sign of humility[65] (this is a source for the fourth step of humility in RM and RB). RM and RB are closest to the Rule of Macarius: "In suffering injustice keep silent. Avoid doing injustice but endure what is done to you."[66] It is as hard a trial as "gold being tried in fire" (cf. 7.35-42).

RM and RB add patient endurance to the scriptural passages. This stance is connected to the courage to suffer and with generosity. RM uses patient endurance often in situations of suffering. This is in accordance with New Testament letters that speak about patience in connection with suffering; yes, patience is the fruit of suffering. "But if you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God" (1 Pet 2:20). "Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance" (Jas 1:2-3; cf. Rom 5:3). It is specific to Benedict to see the same virtues the martyrs practiced as being practiced in community, e.g., in the service to the sick (36.5) and the good zeal (72.5). In each case, "patiently" is the adverb used in connection with bearing and enduring. The focus is not on a stoic kind of endurance but on

62. Therefore, some manuscripts write *sed et factam.*
63. Monléon, *Instruments*, 159.
64. *In Ps.* 55.4.1.
65. *Inst.* IV.39.2.
66. *RegMac*. 21.

patient suffering that is a participation in the suffering of Christ. Smaragdus (197f.) says: "This virtue dampens the anger, quiets the tongue, controls the spirit; it protects peace. . . . It helps us to stay on Christ's path. . . . We want to love and embrace it with joy and all our strengths."

When animals fight and one incurs an injury and stays patient, exposing itself to the other, the second animal is incapable of injuring it further. This is called bite-lock.

Should we put up with anything? Nowadays, we want that the truth is revealed. We may wait awhile and maybe speak with the persons in authority. In our congregation (Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing), a story is passed on about a sister who was accused of theft. She did not defend herself. Only after her death, the guilty one was discovered. She persevered despite the accusations. Surely, this requires a high degree of holiness and being formed by Christ.

V. 31: Love your enemies. (*inimicos diligere.*)

RM 3.36 says "to love enemies more than friends." This is a very ambitious goal. Benedict modifies the maxims according to Holy Scriptures: "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:44). Jesus loved Judas and prayed for those who crucified him. We might want to claim that we do not have any enemies in the monastery. It is easy to love enemies that live in another part of the world. Often, however, the little "enemies" are much harder to bear than the bigger ones far away. We encounter different kinds of hostility, needling, crudities, carelessness, etc. We can overcome vindictiveness and hurt pride if we strive to practice love actively.

Diligere is seated in the will and not in the emotions. Ultimately, this is only possible if we view others in God's light, even see Christ in them. The "enemies," the difficult fellow human beings, make us aware of our limits of patience and love. This is why the abbas tell us that they are our doctors, because they give us our diagnosis. Often they tackle us at our weak spots. This is how we slowly get to know ourselves. When we think that we already overcame a tendency, a remark from such an "enemy" will bring it right back to the surface because it was still hidden inside of us. In addition, these "enemies" give us the opportunity to forgive and thus to experience God's mercy. If we forgive, God will forgive us too (Matt 6:14). This instrument shows the spirit of the martyrs. Enemies bless Christians more with their hatred than with their benevolence.

Such situations are not easy and it is important that we strengthen our faith before and after they occur. It is a grace from God if we do not turn away from loving (4.26) and are able to pray for our enemies (cf. 4.72), but this effort trains us, pushes us to our limits, and helps us beg honestly for God's

grace and love. It is not by chance that this instrument forms the nucleus of the small chiasm (cf. above).

V. 32: If people curse you, do not curse them back but bless them instead. (*Maledicentes se non remaledicere, sed magis benedicere.*)

Again, Benedict quotes the Gospel more precisely whereas RM (3.37) states "not only to refrain from cursing those by whom one has been cursed but instead to bless them." Luke 6:28 warns "bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."[67] Paul also describes that he is maligned while he blesses (1 Cor 4:12). Similarly, the fourth step of humility states, "they bless those who curse them [*maledicentes se benedicent*]" (7.43). *Maledicere* appears several more times in RM (cf. 11.8f., 84; 47.11).

We know about the damage caused to people by such curses and that they can cause illness and depression. On the human level, I think, there is only one way to help to protect ourselves: by blessing. The church provides us with rites and sacred symbols that also have healing effects. At this point in RB 4, the instrument is surpassing all the preceding ones. Evil is not repaid with evil, all is endured patiently; all this is probably a prerequisite, but here something positive is set against evil. And what could be better than blessing? RM and RB mention many occasions for blessing. The elder blesses the younger who infuriated him and will be healed through the blessing (71.8). Blessing contains benevolence, reconciliation, and healing. A saying states that the insult degrades not the one who receives it but the one who utters it. According to the teachings of the Fathers, such insults serve us more than flattery. It is possible that human beings and especially young people generally need more affirmation and acceptance today compared to people in the past who were more robust and received a sound foundation from their family. Jerome says that if we fight evil with good, we will become like Christ.[68] The instruments 4.29-33 let the passion of Christ shine through from beneath and only from this depth will it be possible to bless genuinely when somebody curses us.

A more recent witness: Ingrid Betancourt who was held hostage in the jungle by rebels for years, read in the Bible, "Bless your enemies." She decided to speak words of blessing despite her inclination to say just the opposite. Each time she did this, the word had magical power; she felt relieved.[69]

67. Cf. also 1 Pet 3:9.
68. *Ep*. 84.1.
69. From an interview, *La Documentation catholique* 105 (2008): 750.

V. 33: Endure persecution for the sake of justice. (*Persecutionem pro iustitia sustinere.*)

This is the highest beatitude (Matt 5:10) and addresses not just any kind of persecution but only the one suffered for the sake of justice. In the New Testament letters it is quite normal that we are ready to endure persecution if we live justly and do good.[70] The monks follow Christ just as the early Christians. How many persecutions have religious already endured! It might strike us as odd that Benedict apparently is also speaking about persecutions that happen within the monastery. The fourth step of humility attests this too: false brothers, persecution, curses (7.43). The Rule of the Master is firmly anchored in the spirituality of the martyrs. In the context of obedience this means that the monks persevere patiently as if in martyrdom (7.59). The monastery is a place of martyrdom; the darkness of prison is here, persecution and torture. Thus, the Master speaks of the persecutor and the one who tortures:

> So if a persecutor should subject the servant of Christ to fire, the heat, being transitory, is no longer felt once the suffering is finished. . . . It is right and proper therefore that fasting and abstinence should make us suffer for a short time for the sake of the Lord, so that we may deserve to be forever filled to satiety with the good things he has prepared there. For the sake of God we are kept in the darkness of a dungeon by the persecutor, so that in the perpetual light "we may shine like sparks darting about through stubble." For the sake of God, we embrace death for the moment, so that we may be forever freed from the eternal death of hell. Finally, even when we serve in the school of the monastery under the abbot's command through testing and thwarting of the will. (90.14, 26-29)

Persecution, bitterness, defamation, difficulties, injustice; all this is necessary and is imposed on purpose so that the monks really can become martyrs. This happens mainly through obedience; therefore, the abbot is seen as torturer. Life on earth needs to be dark, bitter, and unjust so that we can enjoy light, sweetness, and justice in heaven. Benedict distances himself from this. He knows about "persecutions" but does not create them artificially for the community.

Even today it can happen that someone who really strives to live in a sincere way will irk others. It is not possible to work for justice if we are not ready to suffer persecution even in small ways. The Latin word *sustinere* appears in RB here and on the fourth step of humility (and later in 35.13 and 38.10 in a more mundane sense) where Benedict tries to alleviate the trials of community life.[71] We can feel the burden but will stay put. Endurance

70. Cf. 1 Pet 3:14; 1 Tim 3:12; Jas 1:12; 1 Cor 4:12; cf. also John 15:20.

71. Cf. *Around the Monastic Table*, 122; 215f.

pro iustitia, for the sake of justice, is the spiritual good of the covenant.[72] In connection with the Bible, this is parallel to Matthew 5:11 "because of me," because of Christ. It is possible that at this point, Christ personifies the summary of *iustitia* for Benedict.

When we engage in efforts of creating more justice in our environment, then this instrument takes on relevance for us today. We will have to anticipate persecution in some countries. This admonition is the last one of this passage (vv. 3-33 in RB 4). Persecution can happen if we act in this nonviolent way, and not in anger, not repaying evil with evil, but bless instead of cursing, enduring insults. This stance is an intensive way of imitating Christ. Smaragdus (201) says: "The just man who suffers imitates Christ."

V. 34: You are not to be proud,
V. 35: not to be addicted to wine,
V. 36: not to eat too much,
V. 37: not to sleep too much,
V. 38: not to be lazy,
V. 39: not to murmur,
V. 40: not to speak ill of others.

Seven more instruments follow and they all start with *non* in the original text. It might surprise us that this needs to be emphasized, but RM and RB know their monks and their fight against these vices. The list is inspired by Titus 1:7-8: "For a bishop as God's steward must be blameless, not arrogant, not irritable, not a drunkard, not aggressive, not greedy for sordid gain, but . . . temperate, just, holy, and self-controlled." In RB, the list starts with pride and ends with slander. We might be reminded of the eight vices in Cassian's *Institutes*, especially the chapters on pride and gluttony that result from *acedia* (cf. *Inst.* V–XII). Probably it is because of Cassian's teachings on the vices that pride stands at the beginning of Benedict's list. Cassian points out that there are two kinds of pride (*superbia*). One kind can be strong at the beginning of the spiritual life and is expressed in resistance, rigidity, proud self-assessment, much talking, and bragging; therefore, Cassian views this one as the first vice.[73] The second kind of pride occurs later and afflicts those who have already overcome other vices successfully. This kind can destroy all the other virtues. Certainly we can say: Without humility, all ascetic practices are in vain, such as mortification in drink and food, night watches and daily asceticism, but also in respect to fraternal relationships. On the other hand, *superbia* can reap profits from all the virtues (which are opposites of the following vices; cf. Prol.29-32).

72. Cf. Kardong, "*Iustitia*," 56–57.
73. *Inst.* XX.2-24; the other appears first in XII.25.

V. 34: You are not to be proud, (*Non esse superbum,*)

In Latin the word "pride" has the prefix *super*, which means over. Somebody puts up his nose, wants to be better than others and might look down on others contemptuously, competes with others. This applies not only to the relationship to God but also to the community and the superior. Like RM and Cassian, Benedict knows about the two kinds of *superbia*; one that is expressed in murmuring, impudence, and willfulness (RB 7.2; 2.28; 23.1; 28.2; 68.4), and another one against which he warns officials such as the dean (21.5), the priest (62.2), and especially the prior (65.2, 4, 13, 18). Whatever kind he mentions, Benedict underscores in these texts (which primarily distinguish him from RM) that he finds this vice to be very destructive and, as the second part of the Rule shows, especially damaging to the community. The book of Sirach names *superbia* as the beginning of all sins (Eccl 10:15 Vulg). The arrogant will stumble (Jer 50:31) and hate God (Sir 10:7), and God will eliminate such a person (Sir 10:21). Smaragdus (202) says in reference to Sirach 10:7 that born from pride are "heresies, schisms, detractions, envy, verbosity, boasting, contention . . . restlessness, lying, perjury and many other evils." Remember RB 65.7: "envy, quarrels, slander, rivalry, factions and disorders of every kind."

According to Benedict, the remedy is obedience, the humble acceptance of one's rank in community, and the resolve to live under a rule (cf. 62.3). As we yearn for knowledge of God, we need to experience ourselves in all our lowliness since before God we are nothing (cf. 1 Cor 4:7). We can compare this stance with the Prologue where Benedict with RM cites 1 Corinthians 15:10, "by the grace of God I am what I am." Benedict adds, "Who boasts, is to boast in the Lord" (Prol.31f.). It is a grace to recognize this truth.

V. 35: not to be addicted to wine, (*non vinolentum,*)

Some manuscripts read: *non violentem* (violent). Does this tie in with the fact that the person who is given to wine could also turn violent? A person can be addicted to wine (*vinolentum*) if he either drinks too much or too often and submits to his cravings each time. Benedict is familiar with this saying by the abbas: "Wine is not for monks."[74] Benedict allows for wine in moderation but not for drinking to saturation (40.6; cf. 40.5). The biblical prophets warn against excessive wine drinking, which affects the zeal for justice and deadens the heart (cf. Hos 4:11; Joel 1:5; Isa 5:22). Wisdom Literature in particular warns against excessive enjoyment of wine (cf. Sir 37:31-34; 31:35-40) and so we understand why Benedict emphasizes that wine could even lead a wise man to ruin (40.7; Sir 19:2). Benedict can refer

74. *VitPat* V.4.31 in RB 40.6; cf. also Böckmann, *Around the Monastic Table*, 243f.

to the pastoral letters to underscore the recommendation that the bishop and the widows should be sober.[75] In RB, sobriety is demanded of the cellarer.[76] This shows if someone is able to have control over his or her impulses and has achieved some health and realistic self-discipline, as discussed above in 4.10-13. As the *Admonitio* of PsBasil points out, many have fallen victim to demons through wine. Quite obviously, drunkenness is seen as demon.[77]

V. 36: not to each too much, (*non multum edacem,*)

Edax applies not only to those who eat too much but also to those who cannot withstand the urge to eat. For Cassian, gluttony (*gastrimargia*) is the first vice that needs to be overcome (*Inst*. V); it is the main root of all the other cravings. The opposite of gluttony is moderation. Nowadays, we might expand this to not being too demanding and extravagant with the things we choose. Gregory the Great warns against having meals that are too big and luxurious and that are eaten too greedily, that garner too much attention and could be given priority.[78] If we cannot restrain ourselves in this regard, we will try in vain to overcome the other vices. Smaragdus (204f.) states: "[A glutton] does not raise his mind to heaven. . . . He is sluggish at prayer . . . and lukewarm in performing any good work." Moderation is the ideal, not total abstinence. Everyone ought to take as much as he or she needs. This is why Benedict uses here the verb *sufficere* several times. It literally means laying a good foundation to stay healthy and fit but not eating as much as the temporary urge might demand. In the Roman Psalter Psalm 62:2 it reads: "For you my soul thirsts, and even my body in many ways." Yet a body no longer yearns for God if it is overly satiated says Smaragdus (204). Perhaps celibates may tend to compensate by immoderate eating. There is also lack of self-control stemming from anger, lack of fulfillment, and discontent. In general, those who cannot control themselves with eating cannot control their tongues and have difficulty practicing discretion.

V. 37: not to sleep too much, (*non somnulentum,*)

Here too some manuscripts have a different reading that certainly comes from some concrete experiences, *non multum somnulentum* ("not very lethargic").[79] We could also surmise that the scribe wanted to weaken the instrument a little. The word *somnulentus* is a late Latin form used by Jerome

75. For bishops: 2 Tim 4:5; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8; 2:2; for widows: 1 Tim 3:11; Titus 2:5.
76. 31.1; cf. also *Around the Monastic Table*, 13f.
77. *Adm* 14.
78. Gregory the Great, *MorJob* 30.18.
79. The instrument could be influenced by the prior one, *non multum edacem*. For reading cf. Hanslik, 34.

and Ambrose; its meaning there is close to laziness as well. In my opinion, Cassian might be a source for this instrument.[80] We can find *Somnu/olentia* in connection with lukewarmness, recklessness; it is one of the outcomes of *acedia* (cf. *Conf.* V.6). For example, it disturbs with yawning the fervent prayer during the *oratio* after the psalm.[81] Cassian recommends to give nature what it needs but always stay with the right amount (*Inst.* III.8.2-4).

One measure for this is the discipline in getting up. Waking and prayer should not be hindered. Speaking against putting too strong a stress on asceticism in this regard, Rahner thinks that especially today sleep should be given its necessary place. Péguy has God say that God does not love the one not sleeping since he will not hand over his concerns to God for even one night.[82] As is clear from the other signs in the Rule, the monks of Benedict's time liked to sleep, although there seemed to be little danger to turn the night into day with excessive work or hobbies. We hear that some of the monks coming late to office were tempted to go back to bed (43.7). So the admonitions of Proverbs were seen as applicable, e.g., Proverbs 6:9-11: "How long, O sluggard, will you lie there? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the arms to rest."

We can also be sleepy throughout the day and daydream. In this way, this instrument is connected to the next one. Figuratively, sleep means to forget about God. RB and RM admonish in the Prologue: "Let us at long last get up! Scripture rouses us saying: 'The hour is already here to rise from sleep'" (Prol.8). And Scripture says: "Awake, O sleeper . . . and Christ will give you light" (Eph 5:14).

V. 38: not to be lazy, (*non pigrum,*)

Pigritia is connected with *taedium* (satiety) and *otiositas* (idleness). Benedict warns against these in connection with daily work (48.1); and as listlessness, as a result of acedia, laziness tries to defy the challenges of nature. Isidore compares this with being sick in the feet, in the sense of being too lazy to walk.[83] "The desire of sluggards will slay them, for their hands refuse to work" (Prov 21:25). "Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the sluggard goes hungry" (Prov 19:15). "I passed by the field of a sluggard. . . . It was

80. Cf. Cetedoc I. The Latin Bible does not have this word, nor do the Rules of Basil or Augustine; it does, however, appear three times in Cassian.

81. *Inst.* II.10; cf. *Conf.* IX.16.2.

82. Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, trans. D. L. Schindler (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 125f.

83. *Etym* X.21. On laziness in the OT, cf. Prov 10:26; 13:4. Cf. Gregory the Great, *Regpast* III.15.

all overgrown with thistles" (Prov 24:30-31). These thistles are interpreted as vices and sins that grow. Especially the book of Proverbs emphasizes the vice of laziness and stresses industriousness as contrast.

Surely, in his time Benedict did not have to warn against the opposite vice, activism and psychological dependency on achievement, and their recognition (addiction to work). Benedict knows a broad semantic field of laziness such as *desidia* (sluggishness), *otiositas* (idleness), *somnulentia* (lethargy), *neglegentia* (negligence), etc. He does not, however, know such a field for the opposite. With regard to manual labor, he warns against pride and dishonesty (RB 57.2, 4-6) and with regard to work in house or field, against becoming sad and murmuring (35.3, 13; 48.7, 24), but he does not issue a warning against working too much or too frantically.

V. 39: not to murmur, (*non murmuriosum,*)

The Latin *murmuriosum* appears only here in this form. It is most similar to RB 5.14-19: "Yet this very obedience will be acceptable to God . . . only if, what is commanded is not performed . . . with murmuring or open argument. . . . God loves a cheerful giver. . . . For if a disciple obeys in a bad disposition and murmurs not only aloud but also in his heart, then even though he carries out the order, his action will not be accepted with favor by God who sees that he is murmuring in his heart. . . . He will receive no reward but the punishment for murmurers unless he amends and improves." Murmuring may even be linked to inertia. This instrument does not forbid justified criticism. Benedict mentions "justified murmuring" (41.5). Justified criticism will be expressed in the appropriate forum and proper way (cf. RB 68; 61.4). Still, murmuring is forbidden. The practice of silence should aid us to develop interior peace and positive thinking as well as discipline of speech.

Benedict does everything to avoid murmuring; i.e., he is above all concerned that the brothers not be overburdened with work. Apparently, he has experienced that overburdening often leads to murmuring. Those being overworked have trouble controlling themselves as they are depressed and view everything negatively. This is why RB offers support (RB 35.13; 53.18) and admonishes the abbot to arrange everything well and with fairness (41.5). Another occasion for murmuring occurs with the distribution of necessities, which is done according to needs. In this context, Benedict is very strict, as he states in RB 34.6: "Above all, there must never be any sign of the vice of murmuring, for any reason, in any expression, or even a suggestion," and in RB 55.21 he speaks about the resentment of the envious. In what other ways could this evil be healed? There is a process of correction (23.1) and apparently gratefulness is a special remedy (40.8-9; 34.3-6).

Murmuring is seen as bad in the Bible: "Let us not test Christ as some of them did, and suffered death by serpents. Do not grumble as some of them did, and suffered death by the destroyer" (1 Cor 10:9-10). The book of Wisdom says: "Therefore guard against profitless grumbling, and from calumny withhold your tongues" (Wis 1:11). Smaragdus (209) points out that a monk's murmuring harms himself and does not improve the other person. That is still true today. A brother is dissatisfied with himself and the world, spots the negative everywhere, and the more he criticizes the more he feels justified to do so. Thus, he does not make just himself unhappy but also his environment.

V. 40: not to speak ill of others. (*non detractorem*.)

We could describe *detractio* as injuring the reputation of another person. Defamation has as its object true but secret things. *Detrahere* means to tear down, to pull down. Each individual's reputation is precious and everybody has a right to it. How easy it is to drag somebody through the mud. RM 3.29 says in a different context, *non amare detrahere* (not to love tearing down). There, this instrument contrasts with the previous one, "to keep faith with a confrere," and the following, "to do what has been promised and not to deceive." The Master seems to concentrate more on reliability.

Benedict is not just against such a habit but also against defamation in general. Apparently, he connects it with murmuring. How quickly can one word follow another! Benedict not only says not to love defamation (not to get used to it) but formulates it more radically, not to be a defamer. The word *detractiones* appears in connection with *rixae* (discord) and *aemulationes* (petty jealousies) in RB 65.7. Benedict must have dealt with this in his community. Here he added it to the list of vices to avoid. Could we conclude that this vice was rampant at his time? This word can also be influenced by Wisdom 1:11: "from calumny withhold your tongues; for a stealthy utterance will not go unpunished, and a lying mouth destroys the soul" (cf. also Prov 24:21f.). Listening to defamation is also grave. For this reason, the Master and Benedict mentioned already in the Prologue that only an individual "who has not listened to slander against the neighbor" (Prol.27) may dwell in the tent, and this apparently means to listen with pleasure. St. Bernard later says that "under the 'varnish' of simulated respect they sigh deeply, show a sad face, cast down their eyes and voice their defamation with mournful tone."[84] It is very difficult to amend such evil denouncement. Concluding this group of instruments, I would like to recall James 4:11: "Whoever speaks evil of a brother or judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge."

84. *In Cant.*s. 24.4.

Vv. 41-58

With verse 41 a series of maxims begins that refer to a person's relationship to God. They are located in the center of the fourth chapter (cf. structure pp. 3–4). This section, verses 41-58, could be divided into instruments of vigilance of behavior toward God (41-50) and instruments that offer some means and help with this (51-58: silence, *lectio*, prayer). Verse 41 could serve as a header for the entire section, "to put your hope in God." These principles are less inspired by Sacred Scripture than by monastic experience.

Let us begin with the first part, verses 41-50. Three times Benedict uses the word "God," beginning in verse 41 and ending with "Christ" in verse 50. We can identify three parts: verses 41-43 speak of trust in God and its consequence, to ascribe everything to God; verses 44-47 speak about "the last things," and verses 48-50 of vigilance.

V. 41: Put your hope in God
V. 42: to attribute to God and not to yourself whatever good you see in yourself,
V. 43: but always recognize that the evil you did is your own and impute it to yourself.

V. 41: Put your hope in God (*Spem suam Deo committere.*)

Benedict speaks again of hope (noun) on the fourth step of humility. "And confidently, in the hope of the divine reward, they joyfully add: 'In all these things we conquer through him who loved us.'" (7.39) Hope is a secure anchor and enables us to cope with difficult situations and even master them with joy. Also on the fifth step of humility we read: "Reveal your way to the Lord and hope in him" (7.45). This instrument seems to have been born from the knowledge that we cannot rely on ourselves; we are sinners. Hope holds true in external difficulties but also in experiences with our own darkness of sin. Smaragdus (211) describes hope as the foot of the one who progresses. The opposite is despair that claims all capabilities of the one progressing. Psalm 72/73:28 calls hope the joy of cleaving to God and putting your hope in God.[85] We can be joyful in this hope. Paul admonishes us "Rejoice in hope!" (Rom 12:12). This instrument also relates to the last one "never to despair of God's mercy" (4.74).

On the other hand, this also means that in the spiritual life we reach a point where we no longer put our hope in ourselves. All these kinds of hope (in French *espoirs*) will be disappointed. We sense that we have built on sand or that the anchor is not set in deep enough. With this, though, the opportunity

85. Cf. also Ps 113/115:11/19; Ps 77/78:7; Ps 31/32:10.

is given that real hope (in French *espérance*) will become stronger and more alive, a hope that does not collapse and is unshakable. I may set my hopes on possessions[86]—through this my hope will retain its vitality—but I should entrust them to God and let God form them, slowly reshaping them until I can say at the end: "You alone are my hope." Yet, this may be a long journey.

If we follow the word *sperare* (or *spes*) in RM, we will see that the Master stresses hope more than RB and mostly endows it with eschatological properties. Benedict shortens his text since he is less theoretical and speaks more concretely about monastic life. In connection with other observations, we may also say that he takes the earthly life very seriously and does not dismiss it too soon. He allows for a slow maturing process.

The word *committere* appears to be significant. It is not about simply setting our hope in God but to bundle up hope and to send it all together to God, to let it all come together in God, to direct it ever more to God as a unity. The word also means handing over to God, entrusting, relinquishing, surrendering, putting something into God's hands (and this also means to release it from our hands). Again, a development throughout a lifetime!

The next two instruments (vv. 42 and 43) need to be seen together.

Vs. 42-43: to attribute to God and not to yourself whatever good you see in yourself, but always recognize that the evil you did is your own and impute it to yourself. (*Bonum aliqid in se cum viderit, Deo applicet, non sibi; malum vero semper a se factum sciat et sibi reputet*.)

RM 3.46-47 expresses it differently: "ascribe (the good) more to God than yourself" (*a Deo factum magis quam a se estimet*) and "ascribing the evil more to oneself and the devil" (*malum a se factum iudicet, et sibi et diabolo inputere*). Benedict is more radical. Sextus writes in his *Sententiae*: "In everything good that you see, see God as its author yet God is not the author of anything evil."[87] Augustine says in connection with the prodigal son: "Whatever good he had, he may attribute it to the one who created him. Whatever evil he has, he did it himself."[88]

These two instruments have some intensive expressions that form a parallel structure into which opposites are inserted:

86. Cf. RM 3.49: "to hope for one's sustenance not from the work of one's hands alone but rather from God."

87. *Sent* 113, 114.

88. *s*. 96.2; cf. Basil, *Reg* 2.3-8,"Let us first emphasize that we received the strength ahead of time for all God's commandments which God gave us. . . . We cannot boast that we could bring about more than God gave us. . . . Surely, this is the destiny of the evil: Using the gifts God gave us to do good in a way that is evil and is opposed to God."

V. 42 whatever good	in yourself (*in se*)	to attribute to God
V. 43 the evil always	by yourself (*a se*)	to impute to yourself

While the Master thinks that the human being is able to do good works and that evil comes from two sources (the human being and the devil) Benedict is much more radical.

As a reaction to so-called semi-Pelagianism, which was condemned in 529 in Orange (today there is a discussion if this was just), Benedict radically stresses the necessity of grace. Even our willing is already God's grace, then also our carrying it out and, above all, accomplishing it in perseverance. All evil is to be attributed to us.[89] These verses are not taken directly from Sacred Scripture but correspond to them. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast. For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them" (Eph 2:8-10).

Psalm 50/51:6 confesses: "Against you, you alone have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your eyes." Therefore, we must accuse ourselves for everything evil and do penance wholeheartedly. Yet everything good comes from God. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Christ. "Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that of ourselves we are qualified to take credit for anything as coming from us; rather, our qualification comes from God" (2 Cor 3:4-5). Sin cannot come from God since there is no evil in God. Sin is lack of being. All praise for anything good belongs to God.

Our text has its closest parallel in the Prologue: "Therefore we are to obey him at all times with his good gifts he implanted in us [*de bonis suis in nobis*]" (Prol.6) and especially in Prol.29-32, "[Those] who fear the Lord and do not become proud about their good practice, but rather know that they cannot do the good in them on their own, but that is done by the Lord. They praise the Lord working in them, saying with the prophet: Not to us, not to us, Lord, but to your name give glory. Just so the apostle Paul did not attribute his preaching to himself saying: 'by the grace of God I am what I am.' And again he says: 'Who boasts is to boast in the Lord.' (2 Cor 10:17)."[90] The same hand is at work in verses 42-43 that already in the Prologue radicalized the expression of God's grace. Human beings may see the good but recognize its original source (*adplicare*): God. With evil, human beings always must know—and this is formulated very radically—it is their own work.

89. With regard to semi-Pelagianism, cf. Böckmann, *Perspectives*, Prol.4 (26ff.) and n. 42 (31); also art. "Semipelagiani"; and Vagaggini, "La posizione."

90. For a comparison with RM, cf. Böckmann, *Listening*, 57–59.

Both instruments are connected with verse 41. The evil is from me, everything good is from God; in this way, I can leave all hope up to God and let myself be gifted with everything by God. I may recognize the good but it has already been gifted to me previously. We are to live consciously from a receptive stance. The opposite is self-glorification (cf. above Prol.29-32). Paul was convinced of this gratuity: "yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). RM is closer to a very earthly way of thinking and assumes a middle position. Sacred Scripture does not allow for such compromises and represents God's claim radically. We are nothing—God is everything (cf. sixth step of humility). In this awareness, we can experience God's love and power. Benedict adheres to a total dependence on God. "Goodness" (*bonum*) is one of God's attributes. Left to our own devices, we are nothing. Jesus says in John 15:5: "Without me you can do nothing." Only with God's help are we motivated, able to act and to accomplish something. In this sense, we can join Mary in singing the *Magnificat* wholeheartedly. Benedict offers an example in 28.4-5. After all efforts to help an obstinate brother have accomplished nothing (*nihil*), all pray together so that the Lord who can do all things (*dominus qui omnia potest*), will bring about healing.

Following these three instruments, RM 3.48-49 stated: "To want one's desires be fulfilled by God. To hope for one's sustenance not from the work of one's hands alone, but rather from God." From a theological perspective, verse 48 is somewhat doubtful since it presupposes that our wishes already are conformed to God's will. Verse 49 stands in a certain opposition to RM 3.45 (RB 4.41). Benedict omits these two verses as he has said everything necessary already in verses 42-43.

In both rules, four instruments with eschatological perspective follow. Verses 44-47 stress the Day of Judgment, hell, eternal life, and death. Verses 45 and 46 are juxtaposed as the two opposite final stages. They are framed by verses 44 and 47 and mention judgment and death. These are the last four things yet listed in a different order than we usually do: death, judgment, heaven, hell. This eschatological perspective might have been the conclusion of the old Christian collection of maxims. In accordance with Sacred Scripture, the eschatological outlook was very pronounced in monasticism. First comes the fulfillment of God's reign and then, more individually, longing for heaven and readiness for death are mentioned. Sirach 7:40 says: "In all you do, think of the end and you will not sin."

V. 44: Fear the day of judgement,
V. 45: dread hell,
V. 46: yearn for eternal life with all spiritual desire,
V. 47: keep the unpredictable death before your eyes daily.

V. 44: Fear the day of judgment, (*Diem iudicii timere,*)

Without doubt, love casts out fear. Nevertheless, who could claim to have perfect love?[91] Only here in RB 4 (4.76) and in 7.64 is there mention of judgment for all brothers. Generally, Benedict uses this motif for the abbot[92] and once for the cellarer (31.9). Thus, Benedict mainly puts those in authority into this highest responsibility before God's judgment. Psalm 118/119:120 begs God literally to "pierce my flesh with dread." We will not be judged if we judge ourselves. Coming from these instruments, we will notice who is addressed by our rules. Jesus himself uses the final judgment as motivation for good deeds. Hebrews 10:27 reminds us of those who stray that a "fearful prospect of judgment and a flaming fire . . . is going to consume the adversaries." A saying in the *Vitae Patrum* (V 11.10) instructs: "Always be mindful of your death and do not forget the judgment of the Eternal so that there will be no fault in your soul." We remember the sequence of the Requiem Mass (*Dies irae)* that describes this judgement very vividly and was sung for centuries. Surely, these words have moved people to contemplate the good and to be converted. Nowadays, this rather causes us anxiety or leads to depression. Nevertheless, the thought of the final judgment is not superfluous as it may help us to consider the Works of Mercy as described in Matthew 25:34-46. The Day of Judgment is also the day of Christ's coming for which we long.

V. 45: dread hell, (*gehennam expavescere,*)

The two ultimate options of hell and eternal life are presented in our rules to motivate human beings to opt for the good. The motif of the two ways comes into play.

Ignatius of Loyola also has a Meditation of Hell in his thirty-day Exercises. We might remember parish missions, which usually had one homily on hell. Benedict admonishes in 7.11: "And at every hour he is to be on his guard against sins and faults." Nowadays, if we would portray this situation drastically to sensitive people we might accomplish the opposite of what we intended. On the other hand, we live in an age that wants to get rid of everything negative and we are quick so say: "God is good, God does not punish." This stance entitles us to continue acting with indifference. What is important here is an awareness of the seriousness of every hour as counterbalance of an attitude that takes everything lightly. Monléon said that just like the fire under

91. Monléon, *Instruments*, 232; here referring to Guéranger.
92. Cf. RB 2.6, 9, 38; 3.11; 55.20; 63.3; 65.22.

the pot on the stove so is the fear of hell the fire for our spiritual life.[93] This was true in former times and we need to ask what this fire is today. Maybe we would expand this to the glow of love. Monléon lists some of the impact this instrument had on robust people: eagerness, penance, acceptance of suffering in life, hate of sins, and love of our redeemer.[94] What could motivate us today?

RB assumes that monks will make progress, and taking up the motif of fear of hell, uses it as motivation to leave evil and turn to the good (Prol.42; 7.11), to obedience (5.3). After maturing in the spiritual life, after the twelfth step of humility, the motivation comes "no longer out of fear of hell [*gehenna*] but out of love for Christ" (7.69).[95]

V. 46: yearn for eternal life with all spiritual desire, (*vitam aeternam omni concupiscentia spiritali desiderare,*)

RM states here "to desire eternal life and the holy Jerusalem." This matches the Master's concrete eschatological orientation. He describes this Jerusalem at the end of this chapter (3.84-95) where we read: "while in the double splendor of heaven and earth divinely radiant, in this very brilliance of the terrestrial light, the city of Jerusalem adorned with gold and precious stones glows with the brightness of its variety of pearls. Its walls and gates, its streets and squares, resonant with the sweet harmony of the singing, forever cry out alleluia" (3.92f.; cf. also 10.92-121). Even though the image of the heavenly Jerusalem is scriptural, Benedict is more sober than the Master and focuses on the preparation for eternal life, which "no eye has seen" (RB 4.77). Someone in the charismatic movement in the United States once said: "The heavenly Jerusalem is here." The question is how is this translated into daily life?

Eternal life is the goal of the human being who is addressed in the Prologue: "Who desires life? . . . If you desire true and eternal life" (Prol.15, 17). The Prologue shows the way of life, the eternal life (Prol.20, 42).[96] Eternal life or eternal damnation are set before the human being who is thereby motivated to avoid sin (7.11). Attaining eternal life is a powerful motivation for unhesitating obedience (5.3, 10, 11). Finally, at the end of the Rule it becomes clear that as cenobites we reach eternal life only together under the guidance of Christ (72.2, 12). The dimension of community is not expressed with such clarity at the beginning of the Rule.

The word *desiderare* is similar to *cupere*—to desire, wish, demand—and is mostly positive in RB. This instrument assumes that human beings are lacking

93. *Instruments*, 241.
94. Ibid.
95. "Love of Christ" was added to the RM text.
96. Cf. 5.12; Prol.15; 61.3; 64.19.

something that they desire. Human beings are not complete all around. Benedict also speaks of a positive desire (*desiderium*) in 49.7 (cf. also 60.8), which indicates a transformation of the human striving in opposition to the "desires of the flesh" (*desideria carnis*) as they are named in the first step of humility (7.23f.).

The intensive adverbial phrase "with all spiritual longing" (*omni concupiscentia spiritali*) is unique to Benedict. *Concupiscentia* is usually negative both in RB and (more often) in RM. In Christian authors[97] *concupiscentia* often means coveting in the sense of physical-sensual tendencies, of sinful inclinations but precisely Augustine who tends to assign *concupiscentia* to the flesh, can connect *concupiscentia* with the good and being good.[98] This kind of spirit-directed desire is related to purity of heart. Monasticism oriented toward the final thereafter deals very intensively with love and desire. After verse 42 it becomes evident that spiritual concupiscence is a gift from God. It is not just an intensive human longing. "This is why the spirit-fashioned desire does not have less but more vitality." Bamberg explains it as a stretching toward God.[99] This deep spiritual longing reminds us of the "inexpressible sweetness of love" with which we walk the way of the commandments, an expression Benedict later adds to the text of the Master (Prol.49).

"Eternal life!" We could add: "What God has prepared for those who love God" (cf. RB 4.77). How will this eternal life be? At the end of the chapter, Benedict seems to give an answer (v. 77) "What no eye has seen" (cf. 1 Cor 2.9). However, we know that eternal life has a person as its center, namely, God. Therefore, it is good to focus already in this life all our longing with love on this person (cf. 4.1).

V. 47: keep the unpredictable death before your eyes daily. (*mortem cotidie ante oculos suspectam habere.*)

"Abba Moses named three virtues that a human being possesses only with difficulty, unceasing grief, continuous remembrance of sins and that he have death before his eyes at every hour."[100] As Athanasius reported, Antony looked at death smiling.[101] Perhaps we may here draw a parallel to the second use of the word *suspectus* in RB. The abbot should always be aware of his weaknesses (64.13). This has to do with distrust but also with looking upward. Death and its hour are not in our hand; in this respect, I consider the SÄK translation using the word "unpredictable" as fitting. The Vulgate uses this

97. Here I am following Bamberg, "Vitam aeternam," 12–14.
98. *CivDei* 14.7; cf. Bamberg, ibid.
99. Bamberg, "Vitam aeternam," 15.
100. *VitPat* VII.35.1.
101. *VitAnt* 59.

word in the sense of looking upward.[102] Benedict himself is an example of this kind of preparation for death. As reported by Gregory, he let his grave be opened and thus realistically faced his death. He fortified himself with the body and blood of the Lord and then died leaning on the arms of the brothers surrounded by words of prayer.[103]

The awareness of impending death was quite strong in ancient monasticism; yet our unpredictable times can also make us aware of the unpredictability of death. If death is right in front of us, we are better able to accept it and from there full life is opening up. Only by considering death can we go on and live a real and meaningful life. We can enjoy and appreciate life.

Jesus admonishes us to be watchful (cf. Mark 12:35; Matt 24:26). Death also brings us closer to the presence of the beloved: "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" (Matt 25:6). Having death before our eyes can be practiced intensely at special times, e.g., during retreat or days of recollection. This may also be helpful in times of important decisions: How would I have wanted to decide on something at the moment of death? We want to keep our lamps burning with the oil of good works, which are described in this chapter (cf. vv. 14-19).

General Christian instructions might have ended here, what follows now are more concrete monastic instructions.

These instruments could be described as "living in the presence of God." The first four verses of the next section (vv. 51-58) could also be connected to this as they concretize this stance and, at the same time, prepare for the next instruments. In chapter 7, the instruments of RB 4.48-54 will be picked up again. A small schema may show this clearly:

4.48 Constant watch	7.10-12 at every hour be aware of sin
4.49 God sees	7.13, 26f. God's eyes upon us
4.50 dashing evil thoughts	7.44-48 revealing evil to the abbot and to the spiritual elder
4.51f. evil thoughts	7.56f. restraint of speech
4.53f. peals of laughter	7.59 restraint of laughter

Each of the three following instruments (just as the two previous ones) has an adverbial or adjectival phrase: constant, in every place, immediately (cf. v. 47 daily).

102. *Suspicere*, e.g., Dan 13:35; Isa 22:11; Gen 15:5; Mark 7:34; etc.
103. *Dial* II.37.2.

V. 48: Keep constant watch over the actions of your life,
V. 49: knowing for certain that God sees us in every place.
V. 50: When evil thoughts come to our hearts, dash them immediately against Christ and reveal them to your spiritual elder.

V. 48: Keep constant watch over the actions of your life, (*Actus vitae suae omni hora custodire,*)

It is questionable if *actus* pertains to actions only. As Smaragdus (219) points out the word relates to everything that acts, is in motion or causes motion, that is, acts of doing, of will, thinking, desire, speaking. "Constant watch" implies watching like a guard who protects something precious, overseeing, guarding it, and also attentively taking care of it. Similar to our text is RB 6.1: "I will watch my ways."[104] The cellarer guards his soul (31.8). We want to keep our lives pure, especially during Lent (49.2). The instrument "guarding your mouth," which follows in verse 51, might be seen as a good means to be watchful.[105] Already from the beginning of ancient monasticism, we can learn about this eagerness to be watchful. Even then means of examen of conscience, maybe of writing, of observing thoughts were practiced! Dorotheus of Gaza mentions that the person who sows on a field but then does not take care of it is not watchful. Soon thistles and thorns will grow.[106]

V. 49: knowing for certain that God sees us in every place. (*in omni loco Deum se respicere pre certo scire.*)

This instrument is connected to the previous one; there it reads "constant watch," and here God sees "in every place." There is no place where we can avoid God's presence, to escape God's gaze as Psalm 138/139 says. *Scire* is the Latin word for "knowing for certain" and it is typical for RB. It denotes a knowing that is not only in the head but also in the heart; hence, translating it with "knowing for certain" is very fitting. It appears often in the chapters that deal with the acceptance of new members who should be aware of what monastic life is about.

A second emphasis pertains to the abbot and other officials as they are especially expected to be aware of the ultimate realities and the goal of their office. This knowledge has implications for daily activities. There is an admonition here to be aware and be strongly (*certe*) convinced that God's eyes see us. God looks at us. *Respicere* actually means to look back and also to look around for something; later it also means to regard in a friendly manner,

104. Lentini (102) thinks that "at every hour" (*omni hora*) is vulgar Latin.
105. Note also the tenor of RB 6 where v. 1 serves as a header: "I will watch my ways."
106. *Instr* XII.130.

to consider. In the Latin Bible it is often used for God and there it is a loving gaze that dwells on a weak person thus providing healing. As stated in Psalm 112/113:6, it is God "enthroned on high, looking down on heaven and earth."[107] Of course, we may think of the first step of humility, which clearly speaks of God's eyes that see us everywhere.[108] Most likely, it is not so much God's punishing eye that is meant here but rather his loving gaze, although the former cannot be excluded, for God's eye helps us to be watchful (v. 48) and to recognize evil thoughts (v. 50). God's gaze is above us, before us, below us, and in us, and it penetrates our inner self. From this gaze stem security, safety, and joy as well as vigilance and attentiveness.

V. 50: When evil thoughts come to our hearts, dash them immediately against Christ and reveal them to your spiritual elder. (*Cogitationes malas cordi suo advenientes mox ad Christum allidere et seniori spiritali patefacere,*)

What in our inmost self would not be proper in the presence of God? It is evil thoughts. How can we defeat them? Struggling with thoughts until the last moment is emphasized in ancient monasticism. RB and RM speak about thoughts that "arrive" in the heart (also in 7.44) and are "sneaking up" in Prol.28. Thoughts (*cogitationes*) are marked as evil here; in general they are seen as negative, even without an adjective (cf. *logismos*: temptation).[109]

With RM, Benedict shares the expression "when evil thoughts come to our hearts, dash them immediately against Christ." "Immediately" can also be found in Prol.28—dashing thoughts against Christ when they are still small. Benedict is more concrete and adds to RM how to go about this. We should not play with thoughts but reveal them immediately. We should at least decide to disclose these thoughts at the next possible opportunity. This is old wisdom that has proved to be valid often and even is still so today! In addition, this concerns not only sin and confession. Thoughts escape us easily but they tell us a lot about our inner state. This is about purity of heart and particularly about thoughts that recur constantly. It is like dashing them against Christ when we reveal them to a spiritual father or mother, a spiritual person. Paul calls Christ the rock (1 Cor 10:4), and the words of Psalm 17/18:3 are interpreted as Christ: "I love you, Lord, my strength, Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer." Patristic writings interpreted Psalm 136/137:9, which speaks of the enemy's children, as the small thoughts that immediately should be dashed against Christ, the rock (cf. also Prol.28).

107. Cf. also Ps 137/138:6: "The Lord is on high, but cares for the lowly and knows the proud from afar"; and Luke 1:48, "For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness."

108. Cf. 7.10-30; 19.1. *Respicere* is used in 7.13, 27.

109. Cf. 7.14-18; 65.5. *Cogitatio* implies some restlessness, even more so in the plural.

Benedict added a concretization to RM: "and to reveal them to your spiritual elder." Who is a spiritual senior? This is not necessarily somebody older in age but who is experienced in the spiritual life, especially in the discernment of spirits (*discretio*) and can pass on God's love. Apparently there were such people in Benedict's community. It is not just the abbot who is named in the fifth step of humility (7.44); in 46.5f. other persons besides him are mentioned: "If it is a sin hidden in the soul, the monk is to reveal it only to the abbot or one of the spiritual elders who understand[110] how to heal their own wounds and those of others without exposing them or making them public." (The verb *patefacere* appears only here in RB.)

Sometimes we are too choosy and have certain ideas about a spiritual companion. It is also up to us whether they can help us. Thus it is certainly important to pray for this particular person beforehand. There are sayings of the Fathers about somebody consulting a younger person, even a child. If we cannot find a spiritual person, we can always come to the rock, Christ, and offer him our thoughts and prayers. We can pray short prayers, e.g., "God come to my assistance," read Scripture, or use sacred signs and rituals such as the sign of the cross. It seems important to accept our own temptations and vulnerability before God's gaze and to trust in his mercy and forgiveness.

The second half of the central part (vv. 51-58) is again divided in two. The first part shows negative expressions in four instruments (vv. 51-54); the second part markedly positive expressions in four instruments (vv. 55-58). Verses 51-54 show a parallel structure. Verse 51 is about guarding yourself against evil and depraved speech, and verse 52 is about not loving talkativeness. Verse 53 is parallel to verse 51, not using words that are empty and provoke laughter (each having two adjectives as v. 51). Verse 54 again mentions not-loving and pertains to laughter; here again this means excessive laughing. We can sense that these four verses are about moderation. The first Latin word is *os*, mouth, i.e., moderation in what comes out of the mouth! As Jesus said, what comes out of a person's mouth comes from the depth of the heart (Mark 7:18-23).

V. 51: Guard your mouth against evil and depraved speech.
V. 52: Do not love talkativeness,
V. 53: do not speak empty words or words that provoke laughter,
V. 54: do not love frequent or boisterous laughter.

110. Most likely, mentioning the spiritual fathers was inserted later because the following verb, *sciat*, is in the singular and probably pertained first to the abbot.

V. 55: Listen readily to holy reading,
V. 56: devote yourself often to prayer,
V. 57: confess to God every day your previous sins with tears and sighs,
V. 58: and amend these sins in the future.

The four verses start with guarding the mouth. The same verb was used in verse 48, the first of the three verses 48-50. There too, it was about attentiveness but it was seen more in a vertical direction. Now it is about some more practical instruments of attentiveness.

Verses 51-54 correspond to RB 6 and the ninth to eleventh steps of humility (7.56-61). These four instruments deal with the manner of speaking and being silent. They prepare for the next four instruments, which pertain to *lectio* and *oratio* (vv. 55-58). Favorably mentioned are sacred readings, prayer (twice), and at the end their effects on life. In addition, we are told in what manner to go about it: gladly, often, with tears and sighing, daily. Whereas in the first part only the word "to guard" is positive, there are four positive actions beginning in verse 55: listening, devoting, confessing, and amending. And verses 55-58 describe each action with an adverbial phrase: gladly, often, daily, in the future devote yourself to prayer. Evil actions or sins are in the past and the possibility for conversion is mentioned (vv. 55-58).

V. 51: Guard your mouth against evil and depraved speech. (*os suum a malo vel pravo eloquio custodire,*)

This instrument and the following have a parallel in Sextus: "The spirit of the wise person is always with God. The wise one is known for her few words. Sin cannot be avoided by talking much. The wise person uses short speeches. . . . Speak only if silence is not helpful."[111] Speaking evil should be banned, but wrong and indecent speaking should be as well. Therefore, Benedict says in 64.5 that the abbot or Christians in the neighborhood should prevent that the conspiracy of the bad monks would be successful. *Pravis* means crooked, unformed, inappropriate, useless, wrong, corrupt. All this does not serve the glory of God or the edification of the neighbor. We are reminded of the importance of the tongue in the spiritual life, as was pointed out at the beginning of the Prologue (Prol.17, 26). What is meant concretely by evil or depraved talking? For instance, sharing about a mistake of another person in the wrong place or out of malevolent motives; unjust judgment; negative, destructive speech; exaggerated egocentric complaining—in a nutshell, speech that destroys (cf. *destructio* in RB 67.5). This is the opposite

111. *Sent* 143, 145, 156, 161.

of words that build up, bring about peace and reconciliation, and foster understanding. Ephesians 4:29 states: "No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear." Sirach 19:6-17 and chapter 20 are similar to RB in describing good and evil speech.

V. 52: Do not love talkativeness, (*multum loqui non amare,*)

This goes one step further. On the other hand, we cannot practice verse 51 when we talk much. Thus using proverbial sayings, RB states that when talking much we cannot avoid sin.[112] Probably, it is with purpose that Benedict added "not to love much talking" (also in RM). Sometimes we are forced to talk a lot; but this is about not having an inordinate desire for it. Another translation is possible too: not getting used to too much talking. This would make good sense here.[113] If we get used to speaking little, we will love it eventually. Words need to be born from silence, they are supposed to be for general use and not for putting oneself in the center or for controlling others. Speaking turns into something wrong if we no longer want to listen.

In our world that is filled with empty words, we may have a new appreciation for the importance of silence and stillness that can open us up for good speaking, for love of others, for peace,[114] for recollection and prayer (cf. RB 6). Cassian (*Conf.* IX.3.1) names avoidance of idle talking, frequent talking, gossip, and similar ways of speaking as precondition to fervent prayer.

Just as vv. 51-52 belong together, so do vv. 53-54.

V. 53: do not speak empty words or words that provoke laughter, (*verba vana aut risui apta non loqui,*)

RM reads here: "entirely to avoid vain words or such as cause laughter" (3.59). *Vanus* means idle, empty, and hollow like a breeze. We are reminded of Ecclesiastes. We have to be accountable for every word we speak, according to Sacred Scripture (Matt 12:36). This does not pertain to jokes that make us laugh joyfully in moments of leisure. Our senior sisters used to say of such remarks: "She who causes others to laugh, earns a complete indulgence." This refers to a laughter from the heart.

This instrument takes us to the opposite case: When is laughter evil and to be avoided? Certainly, when it is aimed toward another person and turns into

112. In this context, cf. also 6.4 and 7.57 with a quotation from Prov 10:19, and RB 7.58 with a quote from Ps 139/140:12.

113. Cf. Kardong, 90; Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs Chrétiens* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 77.

114. Cf. Isa 32:17.

laughing at them; when it is uncontrolled, brings out all the lower instincts, neglects proper filters of shame and decorum (e.g., jokes with sexual connotations), and, finally, if it is directed against God. Ridiculing everything is a powerful weapon against religion. Laughter is a subversive power.[115] Benedict advocates banning such laughter. In the Rule, this usually goes hand in hand with "foolishness, gossip, idleness."[116] Benedict must have experienced how such behavior is detrimental to the spiritual life, recollection, and community relationships. Human words should have gravity, edify and not destroy. The Bible emphasizes this clearly. Jeremiah 10:15 states about idols, "They are nothing, objects of ridicule; they will perish in their time of punishment."[117] Furthermore, Paul admonishes that nobody deceive Christians with empty words (Eph 5:6).

V. 54: do not love frequent or boisterous laughter. (*risum multum aut excussum non amare.*)

This is about very frequent laughter and eruptions of laughter. *Excussus* stems from *excutere* (to shake out, throw out, throw, shake violently).[118] Thus we can imagine a person guffawing, totally losing self-control. A person who loves laughing a lot as well as talking a lot (as described above) cannot go deeper. This instrument goes one step further than verse 53. We should not only not engage in such laughter but also not get used to it and not love it. This must have turned into a habit so that we may love abstaining from it.

We may recall the sixth century and the somewhat rough young people who most likely made up a big part of Benedict's community. As we can see in the Rule, they were often prone to ambiguous jokes and corresponding laughter. Frequent, boisterous laughter is against modesty, can open the door to fornication, and causes indifference toward others as well as the Last Judgment.[119] Benedict does not ban joy that is the fruit of a lived community in Christ.

V. 55: Listen readily to holy reading, (*Lectiones sanctas libenter audire,*)

After the field has been prepared with silence and a certain seriousness, the word can now fall on fertile ground. Silence and listening to the word of God go together. We could debate if Benedict (and RM) want to use holy reading together with prayer as prophylaxis against evil speech and laughter—in other words, to show such reading and prayer as the best means to smother

115. Cf. the introductory comments to RB 6 (p. xxx).

116. Cf. RB 6.8; 48.18; 43.8.

117. Cf. Hanslik, 35.

118. Some manuscripts read *excessum non amare* (not to love excessive laughter); this also makes sense; however, the more difficult reading should be preferred.

119. Monléon, *Instruments*, 296.

laughter and frequent talking.[120] The Master illustrates this especially in RM 50, on *lectio*, where the sacred word silences the empty words of humans. With Benedict, especially in the context of our previous thoughts, we could read verse 55 with a reverse meaning, namely, that silence and inner peace are helpful to listen gladly (*libenter*) to God's word.[121] Benedict uses the word *libenter* together with "to take in" (and hear) in the Prologue (Prol.1). We need to attend intentionally and wholeheartedly to what we hear and it is surely helpful to leave gossiping behind.

When our rules mention holy readings, the authors could refer to all different kinds of holy writings (in contrast to *lectio sacra*, *Biblica sacra*, only Sacred Scripture).[122] Still, this means reading with Sacred Scripture at its center.

V. 56: devote yourself often to prayer, (*orationi frequenter incumbere,*)

We may assume that originally people prostrated themselves to pray (*in-cumbere*).[123] Gestures of prayer assisted the stance of praying. A person could hear a part of Sacred Scripture and so hear the voice of the Groom; yet, additionally, this required that now the response to the Groom came from the heart (cf. this is common in patristic literature).[124] It did not need to be a long prayer (unless it was prolonged through the inspiration of divine grace; RB 20.4), but frequent acts of prayer were appreciated. Only the word of Sacred Scripture enables our heart to find the right response. This is an important law to which Vogüé points repeatedly. Reading and prayer belong together. We receive the seeds of God's word and turn over the soil of our heart in prayer; in this way, the seed of God's word can sink into us and we can give the appropriate answer. (Caesarius in particular is very clear about this in his homilies.) It shows the priority of grace; on the other hand, in the previous instruments we also see that silence prepares the field.

Was this still the concrete situation, maybe with a public reading? In earlier times when not everybody was able to read the Bible? From RM 50, we know about reading the Bible out loud to a group of monks. It is possible that the common idea was to interrupt such a reading with prayer gestures and prayers. In RB, *lectio* has already turned primarily into an interior process (cf., e.g., 48.5). Similarly, the expression *orationi incumbere* (literally: to throw oneself down for prayer) has already taken on the meaning "dedicating/

120. Vogüé, "Lectiones Sanctas," 22; in the English version, probably 103.

121. Cf. also the many passages collated by Vogüé, ibid.

122. Ibid.

123. Cf. Vogüé, "An Invitation to Continual Prayer"; cf. Cyprian; *Ep.* 11.1; *Ep.* 60.5; *De dom. or.* 31.

124. Cf., e.g., Jerome, *Ep.* 58.6; 60.10; 107.9; 130.15; cf. Cassian, *Conf.* IX.36.1; *Inst.* II.10.3.

devoting oneself to prayer." Caesarius writes in his letter to Caesaria: "You need to dedicate yourselves to *lectio* and meditation" (*incumbere*; *Ep* 7.1). Even if these two instruments are not being practiced literally in community, they show clearly the inner relationship of reading and prayer. Vogüé sees in verse 56 the invitation to perpetual prayer.

V. 57: confess to God every day your previous sins with tears and sighs, (*mala sua praeterita cum lacrimis vel gemitu cotidie in oratione Deo confiteri,*)

The entire spirituality of early monasticism is formed by the idea of *penthos*, an awareness of sinfulness! As a result of such a stance, we do not judge others, especially not for their mistakes, or condemn them. Moreover, we know that we are entirely dependent on God's mercy, are aware that all is gift, and strive for conversion. In this connection, the beatitude of those who are mourning (Luke 6:21) has been commented on often.

With tears and sighs we confess that we are sinners. Tears are mentioned in connection with the prayer of the heart. Prayer should then be "not with many words . . . but with tears of compunction" (20.3). Especially during Lent, there is time for "prayer with tears, *lectio*, and contrition of heart" (49.4). Still, our authors stress in our chapter that such prayer should happen daily and be a confession to God. It seems to be important that we do not revolve around ourselves but open our hearts to God, who gives us liberating forgiveness. It is also of special significance that in verse 57 tears and sighing (*hapax*) are linked with the word of God, which is alive and like a sword pierces our heart so that tears can flow. Psalm 37/38:10 says: "My Lord, my deepest yearning is before you; my groaning is not hidden from you." This prayer will be like sighing internally, no sound will travel to the ears of others. Cassian condemns the latter explicitly.[125]

Cassian also stresses that it is important always to be mindful of our own sins.[126] Puzicha (119) thinks that the *oratio* concretely denotes the Lord's Prayer. This is possible, as we confess each time, "forgive us our trespasses."

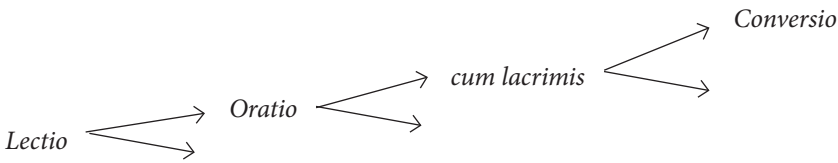
V. 58: and amend these sins in the future. (*de ipsis malis de cetero emendare.*)

Future conversion is the fruit of prayer. The root of *emendare* is the word *menda*, which means a stain that is now removed or dissolved through the look of God or the word of Scripture. Somebody confesses his or her sins and weeps for them; he or she now can trust that God will provide a chance to improve. Isidore of Seville says: "That person who does real penance and

125. *Conf.* IX.35.1-3.
126. *Conf.* XX.6-7, XX.6.2.

in such a way regrets his past sins will not commit them in the future."[127] It appears that this instrument needs to be seen in conjunction with reading and prayer. According to this small passage (vv. 55-58), we could establish three steps of *lectio* that prove to be true in the Rule: *lectio—oratio—conversio*.

The last four instruments could be depicted as a narrative sequence:



Summarizing the paragraph of verses 51-58 we can say the following: The monk is portrayed only indirectly. He has a mouth (51), apparently an ear to hear, eyes from which tears flow that, according to old tradition, flow from the heart. Among the positive actions we can list are guarding, hearing, devotion to prayer, confessing, repenting. This is an interesting progression! Does it not reflect our life? Vigilance is the basis, hearing the attitude that leads to prayer (devotion), to confessing before God, and all of it has its endpoint in conversion.

It is also interesting to track the enemies of the spiritual life: evil and inappropriate or perverse speech; loquaciousness; vain, empty talking; much laughter and breaking into loud or explosive laughter. Following this paragraph some other enemies are mentioned, such as the desires of the flesh and self-will. We might ask if self-will is expressed by much and empty speech and the desire of the flesh by laughter (e.g., sexuality).

As mentioned above, the negative counterpart is described in the first part, the positive in the second. We could also think that to listen willingly to sacred reading (v. 55) is the opposite of evil speech (v. 51), prayer (v. 56) of loquaciousness (v. 52), confessing sins (v. 57) of the empty and laughter-provoking words (v. 53), and conversion (v. 58) of uncontrolled laughing (v. 54). With this, we have two parallels in this section: verses 51-54 with verses 56-58. Regardless of how we organize this section, the important point is that both parts—about silence and good reading and praying—belong together.

Now we come to a new section. The next instruments in verses 59-63 pertain to asceticism (similar to vv. 34-40). They deal with discipline, obedience, and renunciation of inappropriate fame. The first two instruments, verses

127. Isidore, *Sent* II.13.7.

59-60, go together. For our authors, desires of the flesh are connected with self-will. Verse 60 serves as bridge to obedience in verse 61.

V. 59: Do not satisfy the desires of the flesh;
V. 60: hate your self-will.
V. 61: Obey in all things the command of the abbot even if he himself (which God forbid) should act otherwise, mindful of the Lord's precept, "Do what they say, but not what they do."
V. 62: Do not wish to be called holy before you are, so that you may be called so more truthfully.
V. 63: Fulfill God's precepts daily in your actions.

V. 59: Do not satisfy the desires of the flesh; (*Desideria carnis non efficere,*)

Desires (*desideria*) may be good or bad. Generally they are seen as negative, probably impacted by the expression *desideria carnis* (desires of the flesh).[128] In two texts that are original to Benedict, there is also a good desire or longing when it is spirit-wrought (*spiritalis*). "He may look forward to holy Easter with the joy of spiritual longing, spiritual desire" (*spiritalis desiderii, gaudio*, 49.7) and the desire to join a community can be positive (60.8).

In verse 59 the desires of the flesh are being connected with the flesh; this is a biblical expression taken from Galatians 5:16 (cf. below) and refers to flesh not as a part of the human being and the body but the total person in relation to frailty and sinfulness.[129] The text in Galatians 5:16f. reads: "I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want." First Peter admonishes "keep away from worldly desires that wage war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11).

Desires of the flesh concern not only sexuality but also the whole human being; therefore they have a connection to self-will as the first step of humility clarifies (7.12 and 7.19-25). This corresponds also to the Bible (cf. the context in Gal 5:16f.). First John 1:13 speaks of those who are born from the "will of the flesh." Sirach 18:30 also pulls together these two aspects: "Do not let your passions be your guide, but keep your desires in check."[130] Cassian stressed that the young monks cannot resist the attraction to sexuality if they have not first curbed the will through obedience.[131] Self-will is a form of carrying

128. Cf. different desires as stated in RB: 1.8; 5.12; 7.12, 23, 24, 31.
129. Cf. Böckmann, "Der Mensch," 41f.
130. Sir 18:30 is also quoted in RB 7.19 in the plural (*voluntatibus*) and in RB 7.25.
131. *Inst.* IV.8.

out carnal desires. Smaragdus (231f.) names earthly pleasures, vanity, human praise, vainglory, and pride. We fight against these with abstinence, purity of heart, trust, generosity, humility, love, and patience. While RM quotes the biblical text accurately (*desideria carnis non perficere*), Benedict changes it to *non efficere*, which, according to Smaragdus (231), means "not to bring them to effect, that is, not to fulfill them in one's deeds."

V. 60: hate your self-will. (*voluntatem propriam odire,*)

This corresponds to the second degree of humility. An obedient person does not love self-will (RB 7.31). For our authors this is a fulfillment of Matthew 16:24: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Smaragdus (232) explains this *voluntas propria* as a will "that no one else approves . . . since . . . it is not approved by the counsel of any Father." Verse 60 is the strongest prohibition of self-will in the Rule. Generally we can say that in patristic literature *propria voluntas* is seen more positively as "one's free will" rather than only self-will and willfulness.[132] The plural *voluntates* is generally used with a negative connotation. As Kardong and Natali show,[133] Benedict does not intend, as RM does, to create a *tabula rasa* but rather to form the will through and through while, of course, clipping its negative excesses. What is meant in verse 60 is willfulness, self-will, a kind of will that is aimed against God and neighbor. "Not my will but yours" (Matt 26:39) has played an important role for RM (cf. Thp.34-44). Additionally, John 6:38 is foundational for all monastic authors: "I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me."[134] For the Master, self-will comes from the flesh (90.51); Benedict always omits such texts.

This particular instrument includes *odire* (a late Latin form), to hate, which was certainly impacted by the biblical meaning of "hating": "If any one comes to me without hating his father[a] and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life" (John 12:25). Smaragdus (233) asks: "What is it to deny oneself except to forsake one's own wishes?" A saying of the Fathers says: "If you see a boy who is climbing up to heaven by way of his own will,

132. The study on *voluntas* in Cetedoc I was done only for Augustine, Ambrose, and Cassian.

133. Cf. Kardong, "Self-Will"; Maria L. Natali, in an unpublished dissertation titled "Desiderio e/o volontà: un cammino dialettico aperto?" This dissertation was done under Sr. Aquinata Böckmann in 2003.

134. Cf. RB 5.13; 7.32; also Puzicha, "Propria voluntas."

hold him back by his foot and pull him down; this will be useful to him."[135] Every day we pray in the Lord's Prayer that God's will be done (Matt 6:10) and are reminded of perfect obedience.

Logically, an instrument about obedience to an abbot follows. The subsequent two instruments then draw two conclusions: not to declare oneself a saint and, conversely, to be contented with the normal things (e.g., God's commandments).

V. 61: Obey in all things the command of the abbot even if he himself (which God forbid) should act otherwise, mindful of Lord's precept, "Do what they say, but not what they do." (*praeceptis abbatis in omnibus oboedire, etiam si ipse aliter—quod absit—agat, memores illud dominicum praeceptum: "Quae dicunt, facite, quae autem faciunt, facere nolite."*)

Benedict expanded the sentence from RM, which only states: "to be obedient to the admonitions of the abbot" (3.67). Benedict's addition goes way beyond the scope of these short maxims. Certainly this is a later addition that has its roots in Benedict's experience. With his addition he addresses questions of what we shall do if the superior is not authentic, if he has faults. Benedict here points to difficulties with the superior; he understands them but does not mitigate obedience. Most likely he knew from experience that we like to excuse ourselves from obedience by stating that the superior, for instance, does not act according to his own orders. Benedict relies directly and explicitly on Matthew 23:3, which refers to the Pharisees: "Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice." The biblical text is presumably quoted from memory and conveys the meaning (though this wording is neither in the Vulgate nor in the Itala).

We should obey the regulations and orders of the abbot (*praecepta abbatis*). This is the only time in the Rule that the word *praecepta* does not denote the law of the Bible. This expression, however, is right away put into perspective as we are reminded of the Lord's command (*dominicum praeceptum*) in which the adjective *dominicus* clearly designates Christ's command, which Christ has given (synonymous with a genitive of the subject). In the same way the instrument in verse 63 states: "to fulfill God's precepts daily in your actions [*praecepta Dei*]." What Benedict already stated clearly in RB 2.4 shines through here, namely, that the precepts of the abbot are to derive from God's commands and he is not to teach anything that lies "outside" of them (*extra praeceptum Domini*). Furthermore the superior is to show these "divine precepts" in his own actions (*divina praecepta . . . factis suis*; 2.12). Yet despite all his admonitions Benedict knows that the ideal is not always

135. *VitPat* V.10.111.

realized and thus strives with all his strength to convince the superior to fulfill it. Yet Benedict is quite realistic in anticipating that the abbot will at times act differently. And so he issues an admonition to the monks to be mindful of Christ's words. In this way Benedict can also make this instrument more radical than the Master who merely stated: to obey in all things.[136]

A commentary to Matthew 23:3 by Augustine might shed some light on our text: "It is as if he would say: 'Although they say what is in accordance with my will, they do whatever they want.' If you do not do what the bad shepherds do, then it is not they who take care of you. However, if you do what they say, then I will take care of you."[137] There is another thought tying in here as the monks could be in danger to follow the abbot's example. If he is neglectful, then the community is in danger to do the same. If he puts priority on money, they could be tempted to do the same. Benedict is hopeful that the bad example of an abbot is not echoed in his directives.

Benedict does not mention an example of a bad order. Then it is certainly true that we need to obey God more than human beings, as Smaragdus already mentioned (233), while the Master thinks we should always obey. Regardless of whether the abbot orders good or bad things, the disciples refer to obedience and are acquitted in the final judgment (RM 7.55-56).

V. 62: Do not wish to be called holy before you are, so that you may be called so more truthfully. (*Non velle dici sanctum antequam sit, sed prius esse quod verius dicatur.*)

We may wonder why this instrument is placed here between verses 61 and 63. Just as in verse 61, it deals with the consistency of word and action, of inside and outside, of appearance and reality. Is it possible that somebody tried to simulate sainthood by heroic self-submission? The same question is true for RM since its sequence was adopted. "To be obedient to the admonitions of the abbot. . . . Not to wish to be called holy" (3.67f.). Furthermore, the disciples in RM outdo each other in discipline and zeal to become the next abbot (RM 92.33, 42, 51f.). The full text of RM says: "Not to wish to be called holy before one is so, but first to be holy so that one may and ought to be truly so called" (3.68). The latter half of this verse is not part of Benedict's teaching. We may remember that the monks are called "spiritual" (*spiritales*) and that the abbot acts as the model of being spiritual.

With Benedict not every monk is described as spiritual; only some special monks are given this qualification who, in their role as spiritual elders, can

136. It becomes clear in this particular instrument that RB 4 is a chapter for the monks and not, as RM, an instruction book for the abbot.

137. *s.* 46, *De pastor* 46.21.

help others (cf. 4.50; 46.5). We can conclude that Benedict wants truth and not hypocrisy. In addition, the Master uses the world "holy" more often for his monks. In contrast to Benedict, he does not seem to be troubled by a sense of decadence around him; on the contrary, he appears to feel at the height of the ideal. We can see this in Thp.76 where he addresses his brothers as *fratres sanctissimi*. In his correctional code the sinful brother is excommunicated from the holy community (13.4; 14.5), and the life in the monastery is a holy one (24.21). In this respect the last chapters of the Rule are particularly characteristic for the Master: A candidate is to bring with him a third of what he (or his parents) owns to the monastery for his own maintenance so that he may be of use to his brothers (91.51f.; 90.92). And as successor for the abbot "a very holy abbot" (94.6) is sought. Thus, these examples show that the Master uses the word "holy" for his monks outright.

This instrument may remind us of the Pharisee in Luke 18:11 who says: "O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity . . . or even like this tax collector." Abba Or said: "Do not speak in your heart against your brother like this: 'I am of more sober and austere life than he is,' but subject yourself to the grace of Christ in the spirit of poverty and genuine charity, or you will be overcome by the spirit of vainglory and lose all you have gained."[138] In a clever way, some monks may also try to appear holy under the disguise of humility through public confession (cf. comments on fourth and fifth steps of humility). It is evident that we all should strive to be holy as Leviticus 19:2 admonishes: "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." Yet this is not about the appearance of holiness, since a community in which we have lived for a long time will serve as a corrective agent. We are not easily seen as better than we really are and should be happy about this.

The source for this RB verse is the *Passio Iuliani*: "The person who does not want to be called holy unless he really is pleases God. Many let themselves be called so without being holy. . . . They live in the mere prospect to attain what their name indicates. This 'certainty' makes them lukewarm and indifferent. They are to work hard to become what they are called. Indeed, there are many saints of whom no one claims that they are holy. They do not want anyone to know how humble they are and how full of grace. Thus they will receive the reward from the one who knows what they really are."[139] Not seeking an external appearance but rather interior holiness (cf. Matt 6:3, 5, 18)! The more we penetrate the spirituality of RB, the more will we know ourselves as sinners before a merciful God (cf. the Jesus Prayer). Any comparison with others is then put into perspective, especially if we want to elevate ourselves over others and judge individuals or groups.

138. *Alph*, Or 13.

139. Translated according to Holzherr, 2016, 104, n. 46 in *Passio Iuliani*.

V. 63: Fulfill God's precepts daily in your actions. (*Praecepta Dei factis cotidie adimplere.*)

The monk is a worker, and the unity of speaking and acting is stressed. This is, in plain words, holiness: the daily and faithful fulfillment of God's precepts. Holiness cannot be found in being special. We follow the common Rule (eighth step of humility, 7.55) and do not think about being special. Sirach 6:37 warns: "Reflect on the law of the Most High, and let his commandments be your constant study. Then he will enlighten your mind and make you as wise as you desire." The common Rule and the precepts of the gospel point always beyond ourselves and incite us to progress steadily toward God (cf. RB 62.4) and to beg God to fill us with burning love. John 14:15, 21 promises: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. . . . Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me." We are reminded of the Prologue where the admonitions to carry out instructions and orders actively were repeated (Prol.1, 17, 22, 35, 39). James 1:22 says: "Be doers of the word, not just hearers." Only Christ, the guiding principle for our daily living, can sum up God's commandments for us. This is how we can finally run on the path of God's commandments with inexpressible love (Prol.49).

All of this should take place in the ordinariness of our daily living. In the same way that we hold our death before our eyes daily (v. 47) and every day confess our sins to God (v. 57), we now should put everything into practice daily. This corresponds to the end of our chapter (4.76): "When we use them [the instruments] day and night unceasingly," we will receive a reward. There "daily" is expressed by "day and night." In addition, verse 76 shows in a concrete way that the precepts of God (*praecepta Dei*) encompass all the instruments in this chapter.

Vv. 64-73

Some nonnegotiable precepts are named in verses 64-73; all of them pertain to love of neighbor except verse 64. But we may assume that chastity has also to do with this kind of love. Verses 65-69 are formulated in the negative, as they apparently address powerful enemies against a stance of love. Beginning with verse 69, Benedict's instruments are inserted into the text of the Master and are more concrete for the monastic community. This part corresponds to verses 10-33.

V. 64: Love chastity,
V. 65: do not hate anyone,
V. 66: do not be jealous,
V. 67: do not act out your envy,
V. 68: do not love contention,

V. 69: flee pride.
V. 70: And respect the seniors,
V. 71: love the younger ones,
V. 72: pray for your enemies out of love for Christ.
V. 73: If you have quarreled with someone, make peace before sunset.

V. 64: Love chastity, (*castitatem amare,*)

Lentini (107) and others list this instrument together with the previous ones. Therefore, chastity (*castitas*) is understood more in the sense of a sacrifice (4.59-60). The primary meaning would be not giving in to sensual lust. If, however, verse 64 is included in the following instruments, chastity is more connected to love in the sense of a precondition or first step.[140] I am opting for the second option. Another point is that in its short form, verse 64 fits better with the following instruments. As a logical next verse, verse 65 presents a contrast to "not to hate anyone." Chastity refers not only to the body but also to a person's entire way of thinking. In this sense, we will not let our thoughts wander but guard the exits—eyes, mouth, conversations, readings, visits, friendships—and will avoid idleness. Amma Sarah fought for almost three years with the demon of impurity but never begged to be released from fighting. She said only: "Lord, give me strength."[141]

The noun *castitas* appears only here, but the adjective *castus* means not just chaste but also selfless (64.6; 72.8; cf. also 64.9). Smaragdus (235) says that chastity of the body goes together with integrity of heart. This instrument talks about "loving chastity" (as direct object) and this is something deeper. It is interesting to group together all the instruments that include the verb "to love": to love fasting (v. 13), not to love talkativeness (v. 52), not to love frequent or boisterous laughter (v. 54), not to love contention (v. 68), and to love chastity (v. 64). This list shows some sacrifices that lead to discipline but also to the fulfillment of chastity in love. Thus this instrument shows similarities with verse 26, "not to turn away from love." If we would add all the instruments that deal with "love," we would be surprised by their number: Loving God (vv. 1, 77), the love of Christ (v. 21, 72), loving the enemies and the young (v. 31, 71). Herwegen (101) reminds us of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 that start with love and end with chastity. He writes, "The last of the seven fruits of the Holy Spirit, the fear of God, is named the 'beginning of wisdom'; similarly here, we may call chastity the beginning of love and also its crown." Chastity is a gift of grace by God but also calls for a commitment of the human being. "For as a person progresses in mildness

140. Some manuscripts read *caritatem amare* (to love love), which certainly is an interpolation; cf. Hanslik, 36.

141. *Alph*, Sarah 1.

and patience of heart, so also does he progress in purity of body; and the further he has driven away the passion of anger, the more tightly will he hold on to chastity."[142] Even if John Chrysostom is not a source of RB, we may refer to him who strongly stressed that chastity of body is not enough, but that it meant to take good care of God's concerns in everything.[143]

What concrete conclusions could we draw? No exclusivity, but fidelity to prayer and courage to renounce ourselves so that we can love selflessly; overcoming of dislikes and instinctive repugnance, of physical inertia and moodiness; renouncing tendencies to sentimental love. As fruit, we will experience freedom.

V. 65: do not hate anyone, (*nullum odire,*)

The strongest opposite to love is now presented, to hate. This instrument could be an indication that verse 64 deals with love. The following instruments show practically and concretely what the evil zeal of bitterness is (cf. 72.2). According to RB, what should we hate and not hate? Selfish desire (4.60) and vices (64.11) but not discipline (2.14) and, above all, not any human being. There is to be no room for hate! We need to admit that it arises, but what are with to do with hate? If we let it grow, it will spoil everything and poison the relationships among brothers and sisters. According to John 3:15 a person who hates his brother is a murderer.[144] Examples of ways to put this instrument into action are, e.g., acting against any repulsion, struggling to accept the other person, not blaming her or him of something, holding him or her up to God, meditating in the presence of God, seeing with God's eyes, blessing her or him, performing small acts of love.

Vogüé here finds one of the two paths of the *Didache*: hating no one, neither Egyptians, nor Edomites, because all are God's creatures.[145] It would be worthwhile to compare the catalog of good works in the *Didache* and *Constitutions of the Apostles* with RB 4. Cassian thinks that to hate no one is already a minimum toward the general love of neighbor.[146] Today we are reminded of the scandals of genocide, tribal wars that devastate entire populations. This instrument is diametrically opposed to the first two: To love God above all and to love your neighbor as yourself (vv. 1-2).

142. *Conf.* XII.6.1.

143. Cf. Hausman, "Intégrité physique"; she is referring to John Chrysostom, *Ep ad Olympia* 8.4a.

144. Cf. also 1 John 2:11 and 1 John 4:20-21.

145. Vogüé, "Non odiare"; he refers, among others, to the *Didache* and the *Constitutiones Apostolorum*.

146. *Conf.* XVI.14.4; cf. also Augustine, *De Ord* II.8.25.

V. 66: do not be jealous, (*zelum non habere,*)

Zelus refers to the intensity of our striving and the motivational power of a person. If zeal is pointed toward good values, it is good; pointed toward evil, it is connected to envy and can be destructive. It is laudable if Christians driven by zeal for God make selfless efforts to promote a good abbot (64.4-5) but the flames of jealousy may sear the soul of the abbot (65.22); he should not be envious (64.16). At the end of his Rule, Benedict juxtaposes the evil zeal of bitterness to the good zeal of fervent love (72.1-3). *Zelus* cannot tolerate any division of the beloved object.[147] We can combine this instrument in its negative form with the next one, which is jealousy that functions with blind desire (*invidia*). This could explain why some of the Rule manuscripts have them in a single verse, *zelum et invidiam non habere*.[148] Smaragdus (237f.) explains that jealousy carries with it all the other vices that disturb peace and neighborly love, e.g., despising God, pride, infidelity, rupture, and anger.[149]

V. 67: do not act out your envy, (*invidiam non exercere,*)

We read in James 3:14-16: "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice." According to Galatians 5:19f. jealousy (*zelus*) and envy (*invidia*) are counted among the works of the flesh, and Cyprian thinks that their root is pride. While the other sins aim for a goal (e.g., adultery, murder, theft), jealousy does not have any goal or end and turns into an eternal sin.[150] Benedict describes this impressively in 65.7: "envy, quarrel, defamation, jealousy, mistrust, and disorder." The flames of jealousy can destroy the soul (65.22). Jealousy and envy are always sources of bitterness and hatred.

Furthermore, jealousy is a passion that causes unrest, as we take note of another person's material or spiritual gifts (real or imagined). The tendency to be jealous may be more or less strong in different individuals. As long as we do not give in to this tendency, it will remain a struggle within ourselves, yet we are not to give in to such a predisposition. Some individuals may really suffer from their own jealousy. It is helpful to build up our awareness of ourselves in prayer, to come to know that God loves us, to accept our personal giftedness, and to be grateful to God. We have gone a step further when we pray for others, bless them, and thank God for their talents. This

147. Cf. Monléon, *Instruments*, 359f.
148. Hanslik, 36.
149. Cyprian, *Zel* 7.
150. Ibid.

will gain us real freedom. Interestingly enough, Benedict (with RM) recommends "not to act [them] out." He seems to anticipate that we will become aware of such passions, yet we are not to act them out, doing the evil that is suggested by envy.

V. 68: do not love contention, (*contentionem non amare,*)

The word *contentio* might awaken images of a string instrument with stretched strings. There is good tension, but there is also overstretching. Likewise, quarrels can be good and necessary if they are about objective values, but there are also disagreements to promote oneself, to avoid injury to our honor, to preserve power and self-righteousness. Benedict anticipates a monk who will contend with his abbot defiantly (3.9) and thus admonishes not to be argumentative (71.5). Verse 68 does not say "not to quarrel" but "not to love contention," and that surely means that we sometimes need to disagree, but we do not need to seek quarrels or make them a habit.[151] The spirit of quarreling starts with detecting everything negative, always being opposed and constantly following intuitions that are opposite to those of others. Eventually, contention turns into a mistake if it is aimed against the truth, but unnecessary discussions, idle bickering, and polemic boasting are also addressed. Second Timothy 2:14, 24 warns: "Remind people of these things and charge them before God to stop disputing about words. . . . A slave of the Lord should not quarrel, but should be gentle with everyone." Paul knows such people who even preach Christ out of a need to quarrel[152] and counts contentiousness among the vices of the flesh (1 Cor 3:3).

The Sermon on the Mount counsels that if somebody wants to bring up a suit against us or demands a tunic we should give him also a coat (Matt 5:40; cf. RB 7.42). Quarreling can cause splits in a community and silence is often more appropriate. Like the Corinthians, we should take care that there may be no "rivalry, jealousy, fury, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder" (2 Cor 12:20). The Rule of Taizé states: "Avoid petty controversies between Brothers. Nothing divides so much as continual discussions about everything and nothing. Know, if need be, how to put an end to them. Refuse to listen to insinuations concerning one or another Brother. Be a ferment of unity."[153] We are also reminded of the expression in Prol.27: "who did not listen to slander against his neighbor." All of this starts already with a willingness to listen to bad things about others.

151. Kardong, 94.
152. Phil 2:17; cf. also Prov 20:3.
153. Rule of Taizé in French and English (Presses de Taizé, 1965), 44.

Up to this point, Benedict followed RM; at this point he inserts four instruments. First, he pursues the possible root of contention, then he adds two instruments about the younger and older monks and one concerning the love of enemies.

V. 69: flee pride. (*elationem fugere.*)

Elevating oneself appears to be connected to contention. The following monks are warned against superiority: the table reader (38.2), the priest (62.2), the prior (65.18), a brother who does not wish to improve (28.2), the cellarer (31.1), and all the brothers in general (Prol.29). We remember again verse 42: "to ascribe everything good to God." Similarly, Prol.29 shows that we cannot bring about the good in us all by ourselves; any good in us comes only from God. Arrogance and pride, it seems, are the emotions hidden behind vanity. This is a dangerous vice as it knows many means and can even feed on virtues. It is as if pride could pour its poison on all good works (and particularly on good works). All the other vices can be fought with their antidotes, but only pride is easily able to join forces with all the virtues. Asking God to liberate us from pride seems to be the only remedy.[154]

It is important to notice pride in ourselves with honesty. We can even learn humility by facing our pride. Perhaps it is best to view ourselves with humor and be mindful of the benchmarks of the reign of God, in which it is silly to cultivate pride. Abba Poemen says: "If a monk can overcome two things, he can be become free from the world . . . [namely,] bodily ease and vainglory."[155] Cassian has two chapters on vainglory and pride (*Inst.* XI, XII). Isidore considers it more beneficial if an arrogant person walks into a mistake and learns humility through it than if through pride he is conceited about himself and suffers severe damage.[156] At this point, Benedict says to "flee" pride, whereas in verse 12 he changed a sentence of the Master from "fleeing temptations" to "not embracing temptations." This could only mean that we should go or run away from pride into the opposite direction and not flirt with it. It is useful to dash the thoughts against Christ when they are still very small (Prol.28) or to entrust them to a spiritual director/companion (4.50).

V. 70: And respect the seniors, (*Et seniors venerare,*)

It is easy to understand this instrument on the basis of the mentality of the sixth century. We only need to think of how ancient peoples respected their wise elders. They saw this as a way to safeguard their morals and manners.

154. Monléon, *Instruments*, 376.
155. *Alph*, Poemen 66.
156. Isidore, *Sent* II.38.11.

Respect toward the elders was expressed by helping them, not having them work too hard, greeting them, getting up when they came in, asking them for advice, not laughing in their presence. Benedict promotes this tradition. Scripture also advises, "Ask your father, he will inform you, your elders, they will tell you" (Deut 32:7). This respect is emphasized in the Old and New Testaments (cf. Lev 19:32; 1 Tim 5:1).

Particularly in today's competitive society, with its great number of old people, there is a great danger of devaluing them (cf. debate around euthanasia). Yet they show us where our lives are going too; our society as a whole, however, does not like to see this.

In the Rule respect for elders is found, e.g., in the mindfulness of their needs (RB 37), in listening and obeying with eagerness and love, accepting correction, asking for forgiveness when an elder seems agitated, asking for a blessing (63.15; 71). In addressing them, they are given a title of honor (*nonnus*; 63.12) and are offered a seat (63.16). Benedict, however, shows his balanced approach by adding the next instrument rather than staying with just the present one.

V. 71: love the younger ones, (*iuniores diligere.*)

This instrument, in connection with the previous one, illustrates a characteristic of a Benedictine community. It is not always easy to love the younger members. They might show some immaturity, do not always behave appropriately, can be enthusiastic and reckless, and perhaps also question the others' way of life. Thus it is a sign of this love to be patient, to try to understand them, not to expect too much of them, but to respect them and be kind as well as firm toward them. It is a task of old age to allow youth to show their élan as well as seeing with joy and without envy how they are able to carry on the legacy. Benedict himself is a master of this stance. He advises in 63.12 that the elders should address the younger ones as "brothers" and thus gives them a name of honor. At community chapters, he trusts that a younger member may receive a revelation from God with regard to a better solution (3.3). His Rule forms us in *discretio*, to honor the elders, to listen to them, and also to love the younger members, having them express themselves and taking them seriously.

V. 72: pray for your enemies out of love for Christ. (*In Christi amore pro inimicis orare;*)

Again Benedict points out the reality that we can have enemies within a monastery, and in verse 31 he had asked followers of his Rule "to love your enemies." Maybe he sensed that this was still a little too theoretical as he reached the end of the chapter. We need to take small steps and need to

pray for our enemies. Augustine explains this difficulty: we pray and sigh, "I cannot stand these people. . . . I cannot be useful to them, maybe only by my prayers."[157] It is said of St. Gertrud that she likened our intercessions for others to our healing their wounds with miraculous medicines.[158] An example can illustrate how difficult this instrument is: A sister tried to pray for a difficult fellow sister. Spontaneously she burst out, "God, grant her eternal rest." This startled her and she realized of what she was capable.

Perhaps this is why Benedict explicitly stated "out of love of Christ" or with the love that Christ has for us. Our struggles and experiences of our own limits open us to the love of Christ. We can open our hands knowing that "We cannot do it; you and your love need to do it." Christ loves me without bounds, and it is this never-ending and unconditional love that enables me to pray for my enemies. Christ and Stephen did it in this way. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:44; cf. Acts 7:60). Praying for our enemies in the love of Christ means to give our lives in the imitation of Christ, even for our enemies.[159]

V. 73: If you have quarreled with someone, make peace before sunset. (*cum discordante ante solis occasum in pacem redire.*)

RM says here, "to be reconciled to an enemy before sunset" (3.75). Benedict prepared this instrument with the prayer in the preceding one. He speaks not just about an "enemy" but much more generally about a person with whom we have experienced conflict. Hearts were in discord, and a gulf was created. Most likely, Benedict knew that it is difficult to make peace with a real enemy before sunset; it is possible, however, with the person with whom we disagreed. He does not use just *redire in gratiam* (RM 3.75) but *in pacem redire*. This expression encapsulates peace, reconciliation, peace with God and with your brother or sister simultaneously, which may also be expressed with the kiss of peace. The Rule of Taizé states: "As peace with Christ implies peace with your neighbor, be reconciled and make amends where possible."[160] It really is not important who was at fault. We are asked to forgive seventy-seven times (Matt 18:22).

Benedict warns us in verse 25 already not to give a hollow peace but an honest one that comes from the heart. On the other hand, forcing oneself to a gesture can be helpful to come to terms with what is inside. On a practical level this may mean praying the Lord's Prayer at Vespers before sunset. RB 13.12-13 clarifies that irritations that can cause injuries can always hurt like thorns. When the brothers pray and say, "Forgive us our trespasses as

157. *In Ps.* 54.8.
158. Monléon, *Instruments*, 395.
159. Cf. *VitPat* V.17.10.
160. Rule of Taizé 42.

we forgive those who trespassed against us," they are bound to these words and cleanse themselves from such mistakes. According to old tradition, this happens as an evening offering, as is in Matthew 5:23-24: "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift." Certainly Benedict refers to Ephesians 4:26 here, a passage that is again a special interpretation of Psalm 4:5: "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger." In the old Compline, Psalm 4 was recited every night. The Latin text in *Psalterium Romanum* shows understanding for our anger but it must not lead to sinning but help us to come slowly to rest. Abba Agathon said: "I have never gone to sleep with a grievance against anyone, and as far as I could, I have never let anyone go to sleep with a grievance against me."[161] *PsBasil* warns in *Admonitio*: "Whenever you are angry, do not let your anger extend beyond the setting of the sun. (Eph 4:26; RB 4.73). Reconcile yourself in peace and push all anger away from your soul. For whoever embraces peace prepares an abode for Christ . . . since Christ is peace and he desires to rest in peace."[162]

RM adds and Benedict omits "to obey all good persons with all one's heart" (3.76). At first sight, it seems dangerous to view everybody as good and to obey them. In the beginning stages of formation this kind of maxim could jeopardize basic obedience to God and the superior. This then also means that we will always have to check first if the other is really good. Later on Benedict expands obedience to everybody, but not based on the criteria if somebody is more or less good; rather, he admonishes "to compete with one another in obedience" (72.6). This implies that everyone being good or bad can be a mediator of God's will. Still 71.3-4 carefully points out that the orders of the superior have priority.

V. 74: Never despair of God's mercy. (*Et de Dei misericordia numquam desperare.*)

This instrument seems to be placed deliberately at the end; it not only is a precept but also provides encouragement and is connected to the entire chapter. Who of us can say that we truly follow all the precepts of chapter 4? Thus we easily run the risk of being discouraged. On the one hand, this instrument shows the entire measure of our inability and, on the other, God's infinite mercy. RM only said: "And never to despair of God" (3.77).

Benedict intentionally stresses God's mercy and this corresponds to the Rule. In the middle of the fifth step of humility, where the monk admits his sinfulness before the abbot and God, he also experiences that God's mercy

161. *Alph*, Agathon 4; cf. *VitPat* V.4.15; similarly, *Alph*, Epiphanius 4.
162. *Adm*. V, "The Pursuit of Peace."

is endless (7.46). This sentence is the mirror image of our verse 74. Precisely because mercy lasts forever and can never be shaken and even may shine more brightly in the midst of our sinfulness, we must never despair of it. This instrument is particularly characteristic of Benedict. Huerre says: "This is the highest proof of love from a person who has grasped the depths of his misery."[163] The assurance that God's mercy is greater than all our sins needs to fill our hearts deeply and carry us through all our difficulties. This holds true even if have to say with each of the instruments: "I have not really done this." Wherever we are, this last instrument remains. We are assured of this last instrument. Caesarius, Cyprian, and Augustine used similar expressions. We never have a real reason to despair of God's mercy.[164] God is greater than our heart (1 John 3:20), and there is great joy in heaven for each sinner who repents (Luke 15:7). As Benedict quotes in the Prologue, God does not want the sinner's death but that he repent and live (Prol.38; Ezek 33:11). That is why God never closes the door of mercy.

V. 75: See, these are the tools of the spiritual art. (*Ecce haec sunt instrumenta artis spiritalis.*)

"See" (*ecce*) is a good start for this new section. Benedict here speaks in the style of "we." He uses the expression "spiritual art" only here whereas the title of the chapter says "good works." The Master calls it "holy art" and sometimes "sacred art." For Benedict "spiritual" is a qualifying adjective that has to do with the Holy Spirit. And we can rely on the fact that it is the spirit that brings forth our work in us. Yet instruments too are there for our practical use so that we can offer our contributions.

V. 76: When we have used them day and night unceasingly and have returned them on the Day of Judgment, we will receive from the Lord the reward that he promised himself. (*Quae cum fuerint a nobis die noctuque incessabiliter adimpleta et in die iudicii reconsignata, illa mercis nobis a Domino recompensabitur quam ipse promisit:*)

Constant practicing, unceasingly, day and night! Is this a pious exaggeration? Perhaps it could be a sign that everything belongs to God's service. We cannot practice all of the instruments unremittingly (as, e.g., "give no false witness"; v. 7) but others apply literally, such as loving God and neighbor (vv. 1-2).

Jesus himself uses the motif of reward. Overemphasis of this motif entered Christianity through the influence of Pelagianism. Nowadays, we should

163. Huerre, 74.

164. Caesarius, *s.* 199.5; Cyprian, *De laspsis* 35; Augustine, *De Bapt* II.15.20.

not feel superior to such thoughts.[165] It is not about grace handed to us as in packages but about our personal experiences of "reward" and, ultimately, it is the Lord himself who is our immense reward. We can rely on what God has promised us. Again, we are standing before the judgement court, yet what here is in the forefront is not its fearful aspect but rather our great reward.

V. 77: "What eye has not seen nor ear has heard, God has prepared for those who love him." (*"Quod oculus non vidit nec auris audivit, quae praeparavit Deus his qui diligent illum."*)

In RM 3.82-83 we read: "[This is the reward] which our faithful Lord promises to us. This reward is prepared for the saints and those who fear God and fulfill these precepts by their deeds." What follows is the extensively painted eschatological vision of the future land of milk and honey (3.84-94). Benedict is probably reacting to this vision by using 1 Corinthians 2:9 for this instrument. We cannot envision the future since it will be more magnificent than we think. No eye has seen it and no ear has heard of it (this may be a direct reaction to RM). Since Benedict twice omits these illustrations of paradise in RM (3.84-94; 10.92-108) he must have done so on purpose. He is more sober and wants to put the emphasis on life on earth while still preserving the mystery of future life. The quote from 1 Corinthians 2:9 is shortened in most manuscripts of RB. According to Scripture it reads: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him."[166] This quote echoes Isaiah 64:3: "No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him." We can rely on what God himself promises.

For the monks, Benedict names only one quality, "those who love God," which summarizes everything he wanted to communicate. The Master said in the parallel passage: "for those who fear God and fulfill these precepts by their deeds" (3.83). Benedict does not seem too confident that the monks could observe chapter 4 in exemplary fashion. Here he creates an inclusion to the love of God at beginning of the chapter (v. 1). RM, on the other hand, has an inclusion with "those who fear God." Benedict puts the emphasis on love; and this is not only more scriptural but corresponds to his spiritual aim that focuses on love and reaches its peak in RB 72. And this means—looking back once more over RB 4—that all the efforts of working with the instruments need to be inspired by love and are an expression of love.

At this point RM has two more short chapters that Benedict does not adopt. RM 4 is a listing of spiritual tools, essentially a list of virtues inspired

165. Cf. Kardong, "Merit"; Schmidt, "Tugend."

166. For additional versions in various manuscripts of RB, cf. Hanslik, 73.

by Galatians 5:22. The next chapter contains a list of vices and works of the devil that will be punished at the final judgment. This chapter is longer than the one on the virtues and contains a threat of punishment. Overall, this is in accordance with the spirituality of RM. The next sentence Benedict again adopts is taken from RM 6, which mentions the holy art and how to handle the spiritual tools (6.1-2).

V. 78: The workshop where we are to practice eagerly all these tools is the enclosure of the monastery and stability in community. (*Officina vero ubi haec omnia diligenter operemur claustra sunt monasterii et stabilitas in congregatione.*)

RM 6.1-2 says: "The monastery is the workshop where the instruments of the heart are kept in the enclosure of the body, and the work of the divine art can be accomplished with assiduous care and perseverance." The Master here attaches more importance to the individual; Benedict to the community. As we have seen before, many instruments deal with love of neighbor and were not just copied but were, in part, also added.

We are working eagerly with these instruments. Again, the monk is indirectly called worker (*operarius*), just as in Prol.14 (cf. also 7.70). The workshop (*officina*), instruments (*instrumenta*), the work or the eager work (*operari, labor, ars*) are part of the entire semantic field. This workshop is not about activism but about human effort, working on oneself, the normal services and virtues. This is one side of monastic life that Benedict presents, and it needs to be complemented with the other side, that God is working inside of us, is gifting us with everything, and ultimately with himself ("They praise the Lord working in them"; Prol.30).

At this point, Benedict speaks again of the "monastery." This is similar to how he ended the Prologue with "the school of the Lord's service." Where can we concretely practice these instruments? The monastery serves as an *officina*, a workshop that is spatially limited since there is an enclosure (*claustra*), a special area. *Claustra* is mentioned only here and in RB 67—added later—which says no one should leave the *claustra monasterii* (in the sense of running away; RB 67.7). The monk knows that his place and his roots are here. Here is the place where the ladder to heaven is erected (cf. 7.5f.) and where God visits him. As RB 67 points out, this is not about never leaving the enclosure of the monastery. Benedict himself writes about traveling and states that brothers are being sent out in obedience (51.1; 67.1) and then leave with the blessing of the community, accompanied by their prayers.

The monk has his stability (*stabilitas*) in the community (*congregatio*). In their context, these expressions are original to Benedict. He used the word "community" in RB 3.1 already. Its root is *grex*, "herd." Benedict likes

to compare his community to a herd of the weak and the strong, the abbot as the shepherd, and thus refers to a very biblical image (cf. RB 27–28; 64). For the first time, stability is directly mentioned as a noun, whereas earlier he used it to differentiate himself from the gyrovagues who are never stable. Stability becomes especially important in the chapter that deals with the reception of new members.[167] In the spirit of RB, I would define "stability" as the enduring perseverance under the Rule and an abbot, together with the brothers walking toward the goal with Christ as its anchor.

Looking back, we can summarize that chapter 4 truly shows a Christian, monastic way toward a destination, a way that we go in community, a way that only ends in God.

167. 58.9, 17; 60.9; 61.5; indirectly also Prol.50; cf. also Böckmann, *Perspectives*, 180–82.

Chapter 5

On Obedience[1]

RB 4 can be seen as a general chapter that includes almost all the themes of RB. Chapters with the so-called monastic cardinal virtues follow: obedience, silence, humility. RB 5–7 do not show a clear logical structure since in RB 7 (on humility) both themes, obedience and silence, are repeated again but in reversed order (obedience in the second and third steps, silence in the ninth to eleventh steps). From a hermeneutic point of view, we can certainly say that fervent zeal is also one of the cardinal virtues, or even *the* cardinal virtue, and that RB 5–7 need to be read from this perspective.

CONTEXT TODAY[2]

We do not need to expound that Germany's history shows caricatures of obedience in strict military obedience that lacked a formation of conscience. Additionally, in church communities we have seen infantile dependency, though in the last decades the pendulum has often swung in the opposite direction: trends to independence, individualism, and self-sufficiency. "Nobody can tell me what to do!" is a common slogan. But when people want community, they want to be provided for and have their emotional needs met. In our time people emphasize freedom, not only "freedom to do" but also, and especially, "freedom from" dependencies, other persons, fate, guilt. Virtues such as being receptive, waiting, letting something mature, patience, hope, accepting one's place, going with the flow, etc., are difficult for us.

1. In the list of chapter titles, the title of RB 5 has a different form, i.e., "On the obedience of the disciples and how it is to be practiced!" This is certainly influenced by RM 7: "What should be the nature of the disciples' obedience?"

2. The context given here is very general and needs to be fleshed out by the readers.

Nevertheless, we are surprised to notice how we often follow a star or fashion or form our opinions after those presented in mass media. Some sects know how to profit from this. It would be helpful to discuss this context in groups in greater detail.

Benedict Auer compared pre–Vatican II communities with prisons according to the following points:

- a total institution taking care of everything
- a single authority—remaining in the same place
- programmed and controlled activity
- a fixed daily schedule

The individual does not participate in decision making. A renunciation of the individual takes place (in clothing, how to live, what to believe; all take turns doing the household chores). Furthermore, there is a renunciation of personal property; importance is given to uniformity. How could one's personality find expression? Correction is done in a humiliating way. Strict dependence on authority and necessity to ask for permission for even small things contribute to the destruction of one's personality, and many rules turn into attacks on the ego in order to subdue it.[3]

If obedience was lived in monasteries in similar ways (e.g., as in RM), we are not surprised that today the development of the "I" and its rights are emphasized, that such negative language is no longer accepted, and that there are also attempts in religious life to replace obedience with dialogue and spiritual discernment.

CONTEXT IN BENEDICT'S TIME

Benedict lives at a time when obedience to authority in family and state are strictly enforced, and he also stands in a long line of monastic traditions.

The Desert Fathers emphasize asceticism, turning away from self-will that could erect a wall against God. Thus, they submit themselves to a wise elder.[4] Above all, obedience to God is important, and in practicing virtues the wise elder becomes a role model.[5] When stressing abandonment of self-will strongly, it can also happen that the younger monks obey when they are

3. Benedict Auer, "Monastic Asylums" *Human Development* 19, no. 4 (1998): 35–39.

4. Cf. *Alph*, Paul the Simple 1; cf. the useful introduction in Puzicha, 126–28; cf. Sena, "L'obbedienza"; Vogüé, "Obéissance."

5. Cf. *VitPat* V.14.13; *Alph*, Sisoes 45; *Alph*, Poemen 174.

asked to do something that makes no sense or is not good.[6] Syncletica (cf. *VitPat* 5.14.9-10) stresses that obedience is unique especially to cenobites.

In Pachomian literature the biblical commandment to honor father and mother is also applied to the superior. He issues strict norms that are focused on building a community of peace. Especially through obedience the life in community is seen as higher than in eremitism since it is now also a service to the fraternal *koinonia*.[7] Furthermore, *koinonia* is bound together by love. With obedience, a common rule gains importance.

Basil stresses obedience in the imitation of Christ that is radical since he views the orders of the superior as being always informed by Sacred Scripture. He emphasizes obedience to each other since authentic obedience is given out of love for God and the brothers. In the great *Asketikon* the superior is compared to the eye.[8] Augustine admonishes the superior to strive to be loved rather than to be feared (*Praec* 7). Monasticism in southern Gaul knew the saying "Prefer nothing to obedience."[9]

Cassian is the most detailed and speaks of the "good of obedience" (*bonum oboedientiae*) but also shows examples of blind obedience.[10] He uses all the important Scriptures regarding Jesus' obedience, such as John 6:38; Matthew 26:39; and Philippians 2:8 (not Luke 10:16). Cassian is of fundamental importance for Benedict.

A great dependence on Cassian is evident in the Rule of the Master, which Benedict uses as his source, often quoting it.[11] RM 7.10-21 speaks of two categories of monks: those who obey immediately (they are perfect) and the ones who obey only after the second call (they are less perfect). At this point, as so often, the Master falls into casuistry about the content and the manner in which the second call comes and its reasons. The imperfect monks are supposed to blush when they encounter the perfect. We can imagine that such competition is not conducive to building up a community. In reading the text we get the impression that the speedy obedience of the perfect is actually rather mechanical.

RM 7.22-30 applies the image of the narrow path to obedience whereas the people of the world, the sarabaites and gyrovagues, walk on the wide path (7.24). The last sentence in this paragraph (7.30) might make us smile:

6. Cf. *Alph*, Joseph of Panephysis 5; *Alph*, Saius 1; *HistLaus* 33. Cf. also Sulpicius Severus, *Dial. I*.17-19.

7. Cf. *VitPach* 30.

8. Basil, *Regfus* 24; *Reg* 13; 64-69; 131-34.

9. Cf. Eusebius Gallicanus, *Hom* 38.95-108.

10. *Inst.* X.10.12, 23-29; *Inst.* IV.8; IV.12.

11. Cf. Vogüé, "La doctrine du Maître."

"Individually, on their own authority, each one for himself alone, they assume the title of abbot. And you find that there are more monasteries than monks."

RM 7.31-46 contains many negative judgments about the world and laypeople, who are all practically on their way to hell. According to RM 1 and later RM 10, people in the world follow their own will and wishes.

RM 7.52-66 tell us that the monk is not responsible for anything he does: "Whether for good or ill, what happens among the sheep is the responsibility of the shepherd" (7.55). The abbot has to take full responsibility. Furthermore, the awareness of martyrdom is emphasized strongly. The monks want to become martyrs. Therefore, if there is no persecutor from the outside, the superior needs to be the one who tortures the monks, which is done primarily in obedience. Whatever the monk wants, he is forbidden to do; but what he does not want, he is commanded to do (7.58; cf. repetitions in the fourth step of humility, 7.60-64). In this way the monk will reach peace after going through water and fire (7.65-66).

If we were to read RB 5 through the eyes of the Master, we would sense his disappointment. Most likely he would claim that Benedict omits especially the hallmarks and the radicalism of his teaching (that is also interlaced with many Scripture quotes); the Master would find RB 5 too modern and too soft. And Benedict would perhaps respond that he deliberately made these omissions because these traditions did not respect human dignity and were too dualistic (monk/world, laity). After some comparing, we can say that Benedict's originality in RB 5 does not so much lie in what he wrote but rather in what he omitted from RM. There are some smaller additions, e.g., that he once mentions the narrow path without, however, mentioning the wide path (5.11) and at the end also provides a positive sign that the monk is able to improve (5.19).

RB 5 IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RULE

We cannot isolate RB 5 from the rest of the Rule. The first and third steps of humility reflect the spirit of RB 5. Among the chapters added later, Benedict wrote chapters 68, 71, and 72, which stress mutual obedience and also consider the situation of impossible tasks for which there is a dialogue between the monk and the abbot. In these chapters it becomes very clear that the motivation for obedience is love and that obedience is not simply about suppressing self-will but about finding the will of God for the abbot as well as for the monk. Also, Benedict later added a chapter on the council of monks (RB 3) after having written the one on the abbot (RB 2). In RB 3 the brothers are trusted to recognize the will of God and to offer it for their common decision. But most important, RB 72 provides the best lens through which we ought to read RB 5.

IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

The context becomes apparent when we gather all the negative and intensive expressions. We find them in the first part (5.1-10), where they refer to the radical love of Christ (nothing more precious than Christ) and then to promptness. Benedict certainly had to deal with monks who were slow and could not relinquish something easily, were perhaps somewhat inflexible, stubborn, and narrow, maybe even lazy (cf. also RB 2.8, 12, 25). We find rather negative expressions in the third part (vv. 14-19), where obedience is repudiated when it is more hesitant, more delayed, more halfhearted, and is united with murmuring or argument, but mostly with murmuring. Some monks may obey outwardly but inside are revolting, and so they do not obey with their whole hearts. Benedict had to deal with such people as well.

With these two features, community comes closer to us and puts a mirror before our eyes; and thus what Benedict has to say to his monks—and us—is all the more important.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

The chapter has three main parts and shows a circular construction in the form of a chiasm.

A 1 The fundamental step of humility is obedience without delay.
2 It comes naturally to those who know nothing more precious than Christ.
3 Because of the sacred service they have professed, or because of fear of hell and for the glory of everlasting life,

B 4 they carry out the superior's order as promptly
as if the command came from God.
5 The Lord says of such men: "As soon as he heard me, he obeyed me" (Ps 17/18:45),
6 and he tells the teachers: "Whoever listens to you, listens to me" (Luke 10:16).
7 Therefore such people immediately put aside what is their own,
abandon their own will,
8 and lay down whatever they have in hand,
leaving it unfinished,
and with the ready step of obedience,
they follow in their actions the word of the one commanding,
9 and almost at the same moment
with the speed of the fear of God,
both the master's instruction and the disciple's task
are quickly completed together.
10 It is love that impels them to ascend toward everlasting life.

C 11 Therefore they seize the narrow road
of which the Lord says:
"Narrow is the road that leads to life" (Matt 7:13);

D 12 so that not living by their own judgment,
not giving in to their desires and whims,
but rather walking according to the judgment
and commands of another,
they desire to live in monasteries and to have an abbot over them.

C' 13 Without a doubt, such people imitate
the word of the Lord in which he said,
"I have come not to do my own will,
but the will of him
who sent me" (John 6:38).

B' 14 Yet this very obedience will be acceptable to God
and agreeable to men only,
if what is commanded
is not performed timidly or sluggishly or half-heartedly,
not with murmuring or even open argument,
15 for the obedience shown to superiors
is given to God; he himself said:
"Whoever listens to you, listens to me" (Luke 10:16).
16 And the disciples are to give
this obedience in a good disposition
since "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7).
17 For, if a disciple obeys grudgingly
and murmurs, not only aloud but also in his heart,
18 then, even though he carries out the order,
his action will not be accepted with favor by God,
who sees that he is murmuring in his heart.

A' 19 For such a service he will receive no reward,
on the contrary, he will receive the punishment for murmurers,
unless he amends and improves.

A and A' underscore two possible goals (eternal life and grace) and have an eschatological direction. B and B' emphasize two characteristics of obedience: first speed (B) and then the inner disposition (B') without murmuring and with willingness. Both parts quote the words of Christ: "Who hears you, hears me" (Luke 10:16). C and C' contain two important words of Christ—Matthew 7:13 and John 6:38—and are introduced in a similar way. Giving up self-will, living under human authority, and living in community are placed in the center like a summary. Obedience makes community possible—this is a cautious interpretation that we can make at this point.

PART 1: VV. 1-10

This part has a sort of inclusion with the words *gradus* (step) and *gradire* (climb up) in verses 1 and 10.[12] All the way to the center, speed is mentioned in B and B': as soon as, immediately, ready step, follow quickly. Two Scripture texts stand in the center: "No sooner did he hear than he obeyed me" (Ps 17/18:45) and "Whoever listens to you, listens to me" (Luke 10:16).

TITLE: ON OBEDIENCE

The header is similar to RB 6 and 7 and unites these three chapters, so to speak. Obedience, love of silence, and humility must not be separated.

V. 1: The fundamental step of humility is obedience without delay. (*Primus humilitatis gradus est oboedientia sine mora.*)

The fundamental step. In discussions the question occurs if *primus gradus* should be translated as fundamental or first step. If the latter were the case, it would be contrary to the steps of humility, where the first step is fear of God or avoidance of sin. SÄK translates the "first step to humility," yet this is not an exact translation[13] and contradicts the cenobitic teaching that obedience is the main content or foundation of humility and not simply the first step. In her commentary, Puzicha is aware, however, that 5.1 does not establish a sequence of time. She states: "Obedience is the first element, the most important and most lasting."[14]

Without delay. The Latin expression *sine mora* surfaces again in 5.4 (promptly, they do not delay). When Benedict stresses "without delay" in his Rule, it is a signal that something important is coming and needs to be done immediately, e.g., the brothers are sleeping and the signal for the *Opus Dei* is given (22.6), reconciliation with another needs to happen at once (71.8), and, finally, the cellarer should respond to the brothers' needs right away and not wait (31.6). These are not automatic actions but weighty ones; they concern priorities and, ultimately, love.

12. Cf. Borias, "*Primus humilitatis gradus est*."

13. Vogüé, RB 80, and Quartiroli translate similarly. Steidle translates "the highest step." I heard from the francophone area that Masai-Manning even thought that RB 5 ought to take the place of the first step of humility, but this would not provide for a logical sequence. RB 5 has its own message.

14. Puzicha, 129. Cf. Kardong, 103, who translates it as "basic road," and Lentini, 113, as *principale contrassegno*, "the main mark."

V. 2: It comes naturally to those who know that nothing is more precious than Christ. (*Haec convenit his qui nihil sibi a Christo carius aliquid existimant.*)

"This kind [of obedience] is proper to the perfect, few in number," says RM 7.1. Benedict did away with the system of two classes, of the perfect and imperfect. For him all are imperfect. But what is important here is the love of Christ. *Convenit* means it is suitable, fitting, appropriate! Ready obedience is a consequence of the love of Christ, and it is significant that Christ holds the first place among motivations. This corresponds to 4.21 ("preferring nothing to the love of Christ") and 72.11 ("preferring nothing whatever to Christ").[15]

On a practical level, this verse means: If there is no hesitation and there is no time spent reflecting on all one's good motivations, then the relationship to Christ must be very present in the hearts of the monks. Wherever Christ calls me, addresses me, and wants my attention, he receives priority of love. Thinking concretely about ourselves, we might have to admit that it takes us a long time to come to that kind of depth.

But when we are not sure if it is really Christ who is calling, then we need to dialogue with him so that in the end love can again be the strong motivation to obey even if the command goes against my will (RB 68.5). We remember Paul's words: "whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Phil 3:7-8).

V. 3: Because of the sacred service they have professed, or because of fear of hell and for the glory of everlasting life, (*Propter servitium sanctum quod professi sunt seu propter metum gehennae vel gloriam vitae aeternae,*)

Motivation is called upon through reference to the profession the monks have made. It is astounding that the content of profession is circumscribed by two words as "sacred service" (and not as the *three* "vows"). Through profession, the novice becomes a servant and enters into Christ's service (cf. RB 58). Obedience is bound to profession, we have handed ourselves over to Christ, the Lord, trusting that he will do anything for us. He promises that no harm will come to us and the kingdom of God if we obey. The entire monastery is a *scola dominici servitii*, a school of the Lord's service (Prol.45). Christ has not spared himself but obeyed his father until death.

15. Latin *carus* means dear, precious, of great worth.

The last motivation, "fear of hell and the glory of everlasting life," is about the ultimate realities and, in a very radical sense, about hell and eternal life. For the cenobite, obedience can be the decisive factor between them. Of course, we need to think of crucial tasks and not small things. Refusing God's call can be risky.[16]

Following the introduction presenting motivations or fundamentals, we now come to more practical instructions.

V. 4: they carry out the superior's order as promptly as if the command came from God. (*mox aliquid imperatum a maiore fuerit, ac si divinitus imperetur moram pati nesciant in faciendo.*)

We might have a hard time with the expression "as if the command came from God." Actually, it was inserted into the text of RM by Benedict to serve as reason for obedience without delay. This obedience is not just to another person. Pachomius did not say it directly when he required that one obey the superior (*Praec* 30), but Cassian refers to the Lord or God by saying, "as if it were ordained from heaven by God," and so the monk "immediately ran . . . as if he had been ordered . . . by God" (*Inst.* IV.10). The monk does "everything that the superior commanded promptly, without any discussion," and considers it "sacrosanct and divinely ordained." Today we might perhaps say: In and through the word of the superior the monk tries with his whole heart to decipher God's or Christ's command. This is about a very deep listening.

V. 5: The Lord says of such men: "As soon as he heard me, he obeyed me"; (*De quibus Dominus dicit: "Obauditu auris oboedivit mihi" [Ps 17/18:45].*)

Undoubtedly in this phrase, the Lord is Christ who speaks to us in a psalm as is quite normal for RB. Naturally, if Christ himself wants something of us, there must be no hesitation; we are to obey the first time around. The motif of obeying Christ is predominant here. In his Rule Augustine mentions that God is offended by disobedience to superiors (*Praec* 7.1). It is also instructive that the semantic field of hearing appears three times in this psalm quote.

V. 6: and he tells the teachers: "Whoever listens to you, listens to me." (*Et item dicit doctoribus: "Qui vos audit me audit" [Luke 10:16].*)

Immediately, another quote from the New Testament follows, stating that we hear Christ in our teachers. Knowing RB 2, which admonishes the

16. RM 7.3 reads: "for fear of hell, and for the riches of eternal life," where Benedict replaces the plural "riches" (maybe seen as too materialistic) with "glory," which is a more biblical word. Of course, the topos of the two ways that has been used since the beginning of Christian literature also resonates here.

superior to teach nothing "outside the Lord's commandments" (2.4), is to be assumed. The superior strives to assimilate Christ's words and the monk to listen in everything for the word of Christ. In commenting on Luke 10:16, Basil said that the monk can be certain to obey the Lord, not another human being (*Reg* 70.3).

Verses 5-7 concretize once more what we need to extract from the Scripture quotes. In this context, four verbs are of interest that have "to leave" as their meaning: leave (*relinquentes*), abandon your will (*deserentes*), lay down whatever they have in hand (*relinquentes*), and, positively, follow (*sequuntur*). In this way, we are reminded of the vocation stories in the New Testament. Peter and John leave their boat and their nets immediately and follow Christ (*relicto, secuti sunt*; cf. Mark 1:18-20). RB 5 does not deal with service to others but with the imitation of Christ.

V. 7: Therefore, such people immediately put aside what is their own, abandon their own will, (*Ergo hi tales, relinquentes statim quae sua sunt et voluntatem propriam deserentes,*)

Pachomius expressed this similarly: "When the superior orders something, they leave the table immediately [*statim*] and do not grumble" (*Praec* 30). "Their own" (*quae sua sunt*) can be related to the work that the monks were just doing, although it actually denotes belongings and thus has a connection to poverty. They also leave their self-will (*voluntas propria*). Most likely, they would have wished to finish the work they had begun. The phrase "to leave" is again used in the next verse and in a similar context in 43.1, "putting aside everything one had in hands" when the signal for the *Opus Dei* was heard.[17] This is about flexibility and openness and, on a spiritual level, about fundamental receptivity to the will of God who speaks to us through different channels, be it a command, a signal for the daily office, or even a phone call. The opposite would consist in being obstinately immersed in work or in a task or even identifying these with the actual will of God so that nothing else could enter our awareness. Cenobitic life, just as apostolic work, requires selflessness and availability that, in this form, was not required in eremitic life.

For meditating on this chapter it may be meaningful to consider that RB uses the word "leave" again in 27.8 with the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine healthy sheep behind to find the lost one. He too leaves what is secure and ventures into an area of danger. We are also reminded that our Lord did not just ask us to leave things and self-will behind but did it and fully surrendered himself (Phil 2:7).

17. The Latin word *deserere* is used here in parallel to *derelinquere*.

V. 8: and lay down whatever they have in hand, leaving it unfinished, and with the ready step of obedience, they follow in their actions the voice of the one calling. (*mox exoccupatis manibus et quod agebant imperfectum relinquentes, vicino oboedientiae pede iubentis vocem factis sequuntur,*)

Now the expression "their own" is circumscribed: It is that which they hold in their hands. The hands were busy, occupied with work, and now they are being emptied (*exoccupati*). The monks interrupt their task and leave it unfinished. We are reminded of the story of the obedience of a monk who copied texts and did not even finish the letter he was working on when he was called.[18] With all tasks not only some dedication but also an internal letting go is required so that we can relinquish the work if something else or something more important comes along. Nowadays, this offers a great opportunity to practice serenity. There is an ongoing call to put aside what we had in our hands, to empty them to be able to move toward new tasks. Consequently, we might feel that we are never able to finish a task completely. All is *imperfectum*, unfinished; another task moves in front of the previous one. Already in Prol.4 Benedict said that the Lord would complete everything. We need to offer God the fragments of our daily work.

After the hands let go first, we now also see that the feet hurry. It appears that the action of the entire human being is needed.

Vv. 9-10: And almost at the same moment, with the speed of the fear of God, the master's instruction and the disciple's task are quickly completed together. It is love that impels them to ascend toward everlasting life. (*et veluti uno momento praedicta magistri iussio et perfecta discipuli opera, in velocitate timoris Dei, ambae res communiter citius explicantur. Quibus ad vitam aeternam gradiendi amor incumbit,*)

Verse 9 seems even more unbearable than verse 4—especially, if we do not read it together with chapter 68, which allows for dialogue and mutual discernment. I believe this verse is easier to understand when we consider people who are slow to react and are maybe immobile, as is shown in RM 7.10-15. We need to call them twice before they notice that they are supposed to take on a different task. Might Benedict in our times have called us to more deliberateness and maybe even to slowness? He probably might have when dealing with very nervous people, but this does not dispense from basic obedience.

This passage is about synchronizing listening and taking action, which happens with the speed of the fear of God. This requires, however, that the

18. Cassian, *Inst.* IV.12.

disciples live and work in the presence of God so that they can use this motivation to follow with speed and willingness.

In Latin this sentence has a parallelism in it (*praedicta/perfecta*).[19] Presumably, Benedict did not write it this way to produce a nice Latin phrase but rather so that the uneducated and somewhat slower disciples could learn it easily by heart and recite it. The verses also show a correspondence between the disciple and the superior and, in the deepest sense, the Lord.

In RB, the word *iubere* (to command) is used for the abbot and once for God (Prol.41). *Iubere* demands recognition for the authority of the abbot. On the other hand, the abbot is required not to command anything that is not according God's instructions (2.4). The word *iubere* finds its correspondence in the accomplished task (*perfecta opera*), and this is very radical: what counts is not the task that was started but the finished one. In his time Benedict probably needed to express himself in such an intensive manner since completing a task perhaps takes more sustained energy.

The Master has thirty-six verses following this one (7.10-46) about having to call a monk twice and about the two paths. As we have seen already, he places the gyrovagues, sarabaites, and laypeople on the wide path (7.24). He loves the Scripture word about the two paths, the narrow and the wide one, and uses it often in his Rule. Yet he interprets it in the sense that one has to put every effort into ensuring that the path becomes truly narrow, both one's own and the path of the others (cf. later comments about martyrdom).

Benedict concludes the first part of the chapter with verse 10. In doing so he refers back to a concept of the beginning of the chapter, i.e., because of the glory of eternal life, and also again picks up the word *gradus* (step) in the gerund *gradiendi* (to ascend). Only Benedict uses this word here whereas the Master used the word *ambulandi* (to go). Verse 10 again talks about love that is called *amor* while 5.2 spoke about knowing that nothing is more precious than Christ. Now love is pointed toward eternal life and, of course, God is the center. Just as at the beginning, we notice the plural (5.2; cf. 5.2-8).[20] Literally, love is lying on us (*incumbere*). And as in verse 3, verse 10 mentions eternal life. That is why I choose to see verse 10 as the conclusion of the previous verses, and then starting the next part with *ideo* (therefore).[21]

19. *Praedicta* and *perfecta* have a similar sound. The rhythm is better in RB than in RM 7.9, which has *praedicata* (preached) while Benedict turns it into *praedicta* (proclaimed, stated).

20. This causes a difficulty as the relative pronoun *quibus* earlier refers to an indirect singular (*discipuli opera*; the works/actions of the/a disciple); however, on the whole, this paragraph speaks of disciples in the plural.

21. Cf. Borias, "*Primus humilitatis gradus est*."

PART 2: VV. 11-13

Verses 11-13 make up the next section in which verses 11 and 13 frame verse 12. The Scripture quotes in the two verses are complementary, and the result of the two verses (C and C') is described in the nucleus (D, cf. 79/80).

V. 11: Therefore, they seize the narrow road of which the Lord says: "Narrow is the road that leads to life." (*ideo angustam viam arripiunt—unde Dominus dicit: "Angusta via est quae ducit ad vitam" [Matt 7:13])*

"Seizing" does not really reflect the seriousness of the situation. *Arripere* has some violent connotations and reminds us of Matthew 11:12: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force [*rapiunt*]."

The expression "leads to life" (*ducit ad vitam*) is similar to "eternal life" in verse 10 (*ad vitam aeternam*) and reminds us of chapter 72. Good zeal leads to life, and the end of the chapter states, "May Christ lead us all to everlasting life" (*ad vitam aeternam perducat*; 72.12).

If we survey the entire Rule, we can say that obedience is the way to life, yet not only obedience to the superior but also in mutual obedience (71.2; "by this way we Go to God," *itur ad Deum*). Finally, in RB 72, it is also love that is made concrete in mutual obedience. Surely, this is an important progression within RB.

Benedict himself added the word of the narrow path. He speaks explicitly only of the narrow path although he knows about the wide one too. In Prol.46-49 he also deals with this problem (which is a later insertion, i.e., later than RB 5). In connection with Psalm 118/119:32, "for you open my heart," he found the solution that the heart expands on this narrow road. This later explanation of Benedict is certainly important for us in this verse here. From experience, Benedict knows about the narrowness of the road to God (58.8; "through hardships and difficulties," *per dura et aspera*). Since it is Christ's way, it has to be like that. Benedict does not, however, promote creating one's own narrow path artificially. It is called "the way to life" that leads—just as Christ's path—through the cross to glory, through death to life. Obedience is imitation of Christ; if we follow him with hearts opened wide, it turns into a pathway of "inexpressible delight" (cf. Prol.49).

Cassian says that we will encounter many difficulties to reach the kingdom of God since the gate, which leads to life, is narrow and only a few can find it. Therefore, we should count ourselves among the few (*Inst.* IV.38). Similarly RM interprets that real obedience is only for a few (7.1). By using this scriptural image Basil emphasizes that on the narrow path we have to be careful not to step to the right or left of the path (*Reg* 140). We do need a leader.

V. 12: So that they do not live by their own judgment, not giving in to their desires and whims, but rather walking according to the judgment and commands of another, they desire to live in monasteries and to have an abbot over them. (*ut non suo arbitrio viventes vel desideriis suis et voluptatibus oboedientes, sed ambulantes alieno iudicio et imperio, in coenobiis degentes abbatem sibi praeesse desiderant.*)

This one sentence forms the nucleus of the chapter and summarizes its teaching in short form: The monks renounce their own choices and self-will, walk according to the command of another, live in community, and desire to have an abbot over them. The main verb of the sentence in Latin is "they desire"; all other verbs are in the form of gerundives: living, being obedient, walking, and living. What the monks should not do is mentioned twice; what they should do is also mentioned twice. The first pair is formulated negatively: their own convenience, lusts and desires, appetites and mood—all this needs to be forsaken. The educational process of obedience appears.

The next pair corresponds to the teaching of the Master, i.e., to walk one's way according to the decision and directions of another. These four lines especially can be interpreted differently, either from the perspective of RM or from the hermeneutic of community (*in coenobiis degentes*). According to the Master, laying down self-will and emptying oneself totally is the surest way; community and superior are means to this end. The superior's primary task is to see that the subordinate gives up his will. At this point RM further explains: "They do not only exercise self-control in the aforesaid desires and pleasures and do not want to do their own even if they could" (7.49). RM stresses the acting against (*agere contra*) while Benedict in comparison is more positive.

Another hermeneutic possibility is to see the next expression as key: living in community (*in coenobiis degentes*). The permission to interpret in this way comes from Benedict's own development in the Rule. In 71.1-2 he speaks about mutual obedience, and in 72.6 he says that the monks compete in obedience with each other. In everything described in chapter 72, it is certainly important to renounce self-will but also to subordinate oneself to the one who is the unifying point of the community: Christ and his representative, the abbot. Benedict must have increasingly experienced obedience as an element that binds the community together. Hearing Christ in everyone literally means that in faith everyone is honored and that Christ can convey his message to the monk through anyone. Here it is helpful to look at the negative approach of the sarabaites, "who take as their law what they desire" (RB 1.8), and the gyrovagues, who are slaves "to their own wills and cravings" (1.10). In reversed sequence, we can see from here how obedience leads to freedom and community.

We can pinpoint two more tracks in the redaction of RB: chapter 68 is written from the perspective of the monk who receives a difficult or impossible task. He first accepts in obedience but then encounters greater difficulties and reveals the reasons for his inability to the superior with decorum and patience.

Furthermore, we can see how in the course of the Rule the image of the abbot evolves into a person who also listens to the monks (RB 3, added later), loves them, desires to remove the "rust" from them with discretion and prudence. In this manner he wants to be useful to the community rather than just to preside over it (*magis prodesse quam praeesse*) so that all—be they weak or strong—can reach their goal together (second chapter on the abbot, especially 64.8, 11f., 18).

With these three explanations, the aspect of asceticism is not denied but the aspect of community is brought to light as well as the subordinates' responsibility and prudence to put themselves under a wise spiritual father or to ask for appropriate leadership.

The community members desire an abbot to guide them, to promote life, the growth of the individuals in the context of community, who unifies the community and helps the brothers to mature in their relationship with God and each other. This still holds true today; we again and again need to be challenged in our orientation to Christ. Human nature easily tends to let things slide unless somebody takes on the often thankless task of challenging the community to grow in this orientation to Christ.

Cassian describes the strength of a community primarily by the manner in which monks submit themselves to the superior and are no longer their own masters. Those who do not decide to do this live in twos or threes (*Conf.* XVIII.7.4). A little further down, he applies the expression "those who live in community" (as it is then used in RM and RB) to the cenobites. In a later text he says that the virtue of obedience is practiced especially by those "who live in monasteries [*cenobia*] and are ruled by the commands of an elder, who never follow their own judgment but whose will depends on the will of an abba" (*Conf*. XXIV.26.14).

Verse 12 speaks first of renunciation, and then three expressions create the context: their own judgement, desires, whims. They do not live according to their own judgment or follow their own desires and whims.[22] This is similar to the New Testament's description of pre-Christian history: "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deluded, slaves to various desires and pleasures" (Titus 3:3). The letter of Titus also refers to following one's desires as being opposed to obedience.

22. . . . *non sue arbitrio viventes vel desideriis suis et voluptatibus oboedientes.* In manuscripts we find both *voluptatibus* (desires) and *voluntatibus* (wills).

Arbitrium denotes subjective discretion as well as opinion and in RB is almost always used for the abbot; thus it is here explicitly denied to the individual monk. *Desiderium* is used negatively in the first part of the Rule and needs to be transformed in the course of monastic life (cf. 49.7). *Voluptas* describes what a person enjoys, such as sensual desire and pleasure. First, renunciation is called for and, once our desires are transformed, the will may emerge as positive (cf. 4.60).

The threefold renunciation is followed by a threefold positive statement: They live in monasteries (*in coenoboiis degentes*). *Degere* can mean "to spend one's life." This represents the element of stability that is opposed to the gyrovagues' way of life. The cenobites remain under the burden as they walk according to the decision and order of another (*ambulantes alieno iudicio et imperio*). The word *iudicium* is used for divine judgment and the abbot. If applied to the latter, the abbot's responsibility before God is emphasized or, as in chapter 64.10, his mercy. It is not about tyranny even though the word *imperium*, with its strong meaning, is used. Benedict shows concern that other commands could be preferred to the abbot's. The abbot has power but it is used in service to the community.

They desire to live in monasteries and to have an abbot over them. The verb *desiderare* always has a positive connotation in RB. They want to be under an abbot, as was already mentioned in 1.2. The decision and command of another (*alienus*) is now applied to the abbot. He is, as mentioned in RB 2, like a father who is concerned with the unity of his community and adapts to everybody. Today we put greater emphasis on the communal aspect of obedience. The abbot is the unifying element in the community and serves as guarantor that unity can be lived.[23]

V. 13: Without a doubt, such people "imitate" the word of the Lord in which he said: "I have come not to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me." (*Sine dubio hi tales illam Domini imitantur sententiam qua dicit, "Non veni facere voluntatem meam, sed eius qui misit me" [John 6:38]*.)

Without a doubt, these are the people who fulfill the Lord's word. Where does Benedict use the expression "without a doubt"? The abbot must give an account for the souls of his monks and "no doubt also for his own" (2.38) as well as for all his decisions (3.11) before the most just judge. The cellarer knows without a doubt that the person who serves well will receive a good

23. Cf. Rule of Taizé 55: "There is no hope for a bold and total service of Jesus Christ without unity in mind. . . . The prior focuses the unity of the Community."

reward (31.8-9).[24] The expression appears only in connection with important points that are mostly related to the faith in an afterlife.

RB 5.13 deals with the belief that the monks will become Christlike. In this context, the Latin verb *imitare* is not to be translated with "imitate" but with "internalize" and "to become, conform." The direct object here is the word of the Lord. In other words: this word takes shape in them, works in them, and embodies itself in them.[25]

The biblical quote in this verse is not found in this form in the Latin Bible, but it expresses its meaning. Jesus says in John 6:38, "I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me."[26] Benedict uses John 6:38 again in the second step of humility (7.32). This biblical verse illustrates that Christ's will was not destroyed to make room for the Father's will but rather that the human will conforms to the divine will; the divine will molds the human will. If we were to interpret this verse superficially in connection with chapter 5, we could conclude that the monk first has to "hand over" his own will. Yet with the Bible we can state that the energy of self-will is to be transformed and to focus its entire energy on the will of God.

Monastic and patristic literature refers to this passage.[27] It is evident that the text is recalled from memory. Benedict's quote is closest to Cassian.[28] Whereas Basil has the biblical "came down from heaven" (*descendi*),[29] Cassian uses "I have not come" (*non veni*) just as in our rules.[30] In this context, my will (*voluntas mea*) pertains to the human will that in the Savior is to become totally oriented to God's will. Furthermore, it is interesting that the authors put these words into the mouth of the Lord (*Dominus*). Basil describes this stance in a brother as *imitatio* when we as human beings follow God's will and overcome our self-will.[31] The main direction here is toward conforming to Christ; according to our authors, this is only possible by overcoming our self-will and by self-denial (cf. RB 4.10).

24. Cf. also RB 77.7: "without a doubt" we have to understand that descending and ascending on the ladder as descending by self-exaltation and ascending by humility.

25. Cf. A. Heitmann, *Imitatio Dei*; cf. art. "Mimeomai," *ThWNT*.

26. Cf. also John 7:28-29. We are reminded of Heb 10:9, "Behold, I come to do your will."

27. Cf. Basil, *Reg* 12.14-15; 80.1; 181; 184.1; Cassian, *Conf.* XVI.6.4; XIX.6.6; *Hist-Mon* 31.14.

28. *Conf*. XVI.6.4 and XIX.6.6. RM and RB shorten the text somewhat; in comparison to RM Benedict often makes adjustments because of rhythm.

29. "I have descended," *Reg* 12.15.

30. Basil, *Reg* 12.14-15. The sentence has been simplified some more, "I have not come to do my own will." Basil, *Reg* 80.2; cf. Cassian *Conf*. XVI.6.4; cf. XIX.6.6ff. while the original text reads, "I have descended not to do my own will."

31. In *Conf.* XVI.6.4: *imitator.*

When we compare the two Scripture passages that surround the nucleus in 5.12, we will notice in verse 13 the descending way of the Lord coming down from the Father. He came to do the will and to carry out the plan of the one who sent him. It is his call and mission to conform himself entirely to the Father's plan of salvation. Christ himself is obedient to the Father. It is the love for the Father that impels Christ to submit himself totally to the Father, and it is the love of the Father for the world ("For God so loved the world"; John 3:16) to send his only son. At no other place is it made as clear that love is a facet of obedience. For us it is important to walk this same way, to integrate ourselves into the plan of salvation through the imitation of Christ in order to contribute to the realization of this salvific plan. We could say that this is our mission. This descending way for Christ is also the narrow way for us (v. 11) that leads upward, to life.

PART 3: VV. 14-19

Following this verse, RM has a long explanation about giving up responsibility in obedience and about the "martyrdom of obedience" (7.52-66). Some salient sentences shall be quoted here: Since they obey their master in everything, "they are made secure about the account they will have to give of their soul [54]. . . . This is so because, whether for good or ill, what happens among the sheep is the responsibility of the shepherd [55], . . . and not he who carried out orders, whether good or bad [56]. . . . But bearing the yoke of another's judgment, they are restrained from going where their own pleasure would lead them, and what they themselves would choose to do or achieve is denied them by the master [58]. In the monastery their will is daily thwarted for the sake of the Lord, and in the spirit of martyrdom they patiently endure whatever commands they receive to test them [59]." (Then follows a text that is similar to the fourth step of humility.)

V. 14: Yet this very obedience will be acceptable to God and agreeable to men only if what is commanded is not performed timidly or sluggishly or half-heartedly, not with murmuring or open argument, (*Sed haec ipsa oboedientia tunc acceptabilis erit Deo et dulcis hominibus, si quod iubetur non trepide, non tarde, non tepide, aut cum murmurio vel cum responso nolentis efficatur,*)

The expression "pleasing to God" (*acceptabilis . . . Deo*) is liturgical language. May the sacrifice be pleasing to God. Verse 18 says similarly "accepted by God [*acceptum . . . Deo*]." Obedience is already seen as something good (*bonum*) here, as a gift that we bring to God. We remember 1 Samuel 15:22: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obe-

dience to the Lord's command? Obedience is better than sacrifice, listening better than the fat of rams."

Agreeable to men (*dulcis hominibus*) is an interesting phrase. Probably "men" does not just denote the superior but refers also to the atmosphere within the community (and in the apostolates). Again, obedience is presented as something conducive to community.

Not timidly or sluggishly or half-heartedly (*non trepide, non tarde, non tepide*) appears to be an onomatopoeia in Latin serving as a help for the disciple's memorization.[32] We can also see these three words as a summary of verses 4-10.

The expression "not timidly" (*non trepide*) can mean not slowly, but also not zealously; it is similar to a German expression *trippeln*, which expresses scurrying that may be caused by busyness but also by anxiety and restless. Most translations have expressions similar to "timid," but we can also imagine monks who are too superficial or quick and act before they have fully grasped the seriousness of the task. "Sluggishly" (*tarde*), tardy is clearly the opposite of obedience without delay. It appears that Benedict had to deal with such slow people. Slowness can also stem from resistance to or disinterest in other human beings and God. Let me alone! For instance, the cellarer should not be sluggish and postpone tasks (31.1) until he eventually just drops them. "Not half-hearted" can also mean listless. We are reminded of Revelation 3:15-16: "I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm [*tepidus*], neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." There is a lack of motivation to just do what is ordered but without eagerness and love.

Not with murmuring (*non cum murmurio*). Murmuring is mentioned directly in this paragraph four times. Increasingly, this chapter deals with the interior motivation. Verse 18 describes the person who reserves his or her own judgment and grumbles either in the heart or with the tongue. The order is carried out only cursorily. In this respect Basil is very radical: "Since the apostle said, 'do everything without grumbling or questioning' (Phil 2:14), anyone who grumbles separates himself from the unity among the brothers. . . . It is quite clear that because of his lack of faith and uncertainty, such a brother's hope is weak" (*Reg* 71).

With open argument (*cum responso nolentis*). This Latin expression appears also in Matthew 21:29, where the second son says to the father "I will not." Later he regretted it and went. Benedict and his sources here go beyond the gospel text. It is presumed that the command will be fulfilled swiftly but with

32. Note that Benedict reversed the order of the words in RM—*non trepide*, *non tepide*, *non tarde*—probably for the sake of meter.

arguing. Basically, the monk does not want to do it but only appears to accept. This kind of obedience is not acceptable to God and human beings. God can see everything (cf. 5.18; first step of humility). How can we dare to give God such a lukewarm and shallow sacrifice? We can also sense that such obedience may have a negative, even paralyzing, effect on the entire community. On the other hand, wholehearted obedience can build up the community.

V. 15: for the obedience shown to superiors is given to God; he himself said: "Whoever listens to you, listens to me." (*quia oboedientia quae maioribus praebetur Deo exhibetur—ipse enim dixit: "Qui vos audit me audit" [Luke 10:16].*)

Now the biblical word from Luke 10:16 is repeated yet is put into God's mouth. God and the superior are recipients of obedience, so to speak. We can use two interpretations: first, that Benedict calls Christ God and, second, that obedience continues from listening to Christ to listening in God (into the Father). While the word Lord (*Dominus*) or pronouns predominate in the first part of the chapter, the word God (*Deus*) or pronouns appear six times in this last part. This is not the case in RM, which uses the word *Dominus* in the corresponding verse.

V. 16: And the disciples are to give this obedience in a good disposition, for "God loves a cheerful giver." (*Et cum bono animo a discipulis praeberi oportet, quia "hilarem datorem diligit Deus" [2 Cor 9:7].*)

Animus is not used very often in RB.[33] *Bono animo* is the opposite of *malo animo* in the following verse. We could also translate it as "good will."

We read in the middle of this paragraph that God loves a cheerful giver. May we think of Christ or God the Father? If Christ is meant, it would create a closer parallel to the fourth step of humility: "we conquer through him who loved us" (7.39). God's love and Christ's love for us always precede obedience, and then our response can also be one of love for Christ or God. If we think of God the Father, then obedience in conformity with Christ is meant, that is, a participation in Christ's loving response to the Father, who loves the world so much that he gives his only son (cf. John 3:16). This represents, as it were, a breakthrough in the understanding of obedience when it is seen here as a joyful gift to God. This joy is not forced but comes from a generous heart and, above all, from love.

Here we need to stress that it is unique to Benedict (as opposed to the Master) to place such emphasis on love in connection with obedience.[34]

33. Cf. Böckmann, "Der Mensch," 43.
34. Cf. RB 7.34; 71.4; 72.6; and 68.5.

The word *hilaris* (joyful) appears only here in RB. We can also think of an experience of God's love that brings joy. The underlying scriptural text is 2 Corinthians 9:7 where the Christians bless others because they have received blessings themselves and generously share their wealth with the poor in Jerusalem. In the semantic field of sparse giving, we find words like "stinginess," "sparseness," "sadness," "out of necessity" (cf. 2 Cor 9:6f.). Such behavior shows interactions with God that are calculating as the person wants to preserve himself or what he has. This part in the Second Letter to the Corinthians can serve well as an illustration of verses 14-17 (also Sir 35:9-11).[35] Obedience is a response to the great blessing and the love of God for us; it is a little response but it should be joyful and given wholeheartedly. God's greatness of heart cannot be outdone, and the same is also true for obedience.

Basil (*Reg* 93) compares the murmuring brothers with the Israelites in the desert. Pachomius says that, if someone has the habit of murmuring, he needs to be shown five times that his reasoning is wrong, and finally he is taken to the infirmary since he is sick (*PraecIud* 5).

Vv. 17-18: For if a disciple obeys in a bad disposition and murmurs, not only aloud, but also in his heart, then, even though he carries out the order, his action will not be accepted with favor by God, who sees that he is murmuring in his heart. (*Nam, cum malo animo si oboedit discipulus et non solum ore sed etiam in corde si murmuraverit, etiam si impleat iussionem, tamen acceptum iam non erit Deo qui cor eius respicit mumurantem,*)

Of course, we think of the Israelites' journey through the desert and their murmuring so that God had to send the serpents but also the remedy (Num 14:1-37). Regarding murmuring, it appears that Benedict deals with it more than the Master, who, on the other hand, prescribes more control.[36]

Verse 18 repeats these thoughts: With superficial obedience God is not pleased by the gift of obedience, for he sees the murmuring heart.

V. 19: For such a service he will receive no reward; on the contrary, he will receive the punishment for murmurers unless he amends and improves. (*et pro tali facto nullam consequitur gratiam; immo poenam murmurantium incurrit, si non cum satisfactione emendaverit.*)

Here Benedict shows himself quite independent of RM, where the conclusion only mentioned that the monk would not receive a reward. We read in RM 7.73-74: "To repeat, even though he does what he is told, but does it in

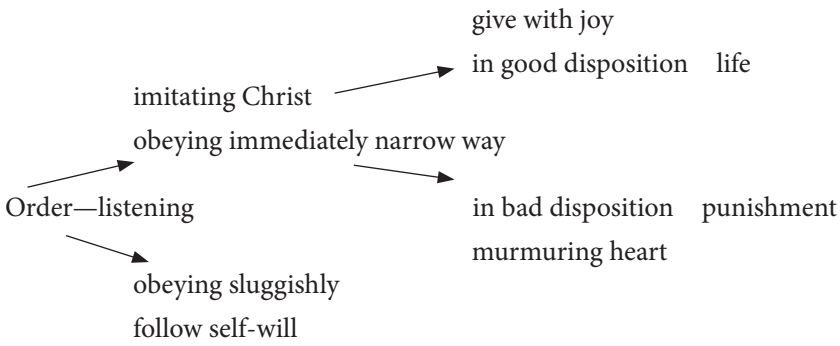
35. Cf. Sir 35:9-11; the author here thinks of vv. 9-11 in the Vulgate; in modern translations, 35:6-8.

36. Cf. RB 34.6; 40.8; and comments on RB 4.39; cf. also Augustine, *OM* 5.

a bad mood, he will get no reward for doing it, for God is watching his heart right now and finds in it the wretched disposition of one who acts in this way." Therefore, this chapter in RM closes with a negative. Benedict lists two possibilities: first, no grace but the punishment for grumblers and, second, that one can also better oneself through making amends. The word "improve" (*emendaverit*) is at the end of the chapter; before it, however, a threat of punishment, *poena murmurantium*! Most likely, we think of the punishment of the serpents in the desert. The combination of the Latin words *consequitur gratiam* (receives a reward) is interesting since grace, in the proper sense of the word, is a gift. Surely, it is a reward of grace, and grace is not seen as a quantity but according to the Greek expression as beauty, favor, and radiance through which we are made whole. Similarly, the Latin Bible states that we achieve mercy (*consequi—misericordiam*). To me, *consequi gratiam* seems to be liturgical language.[37]

LOOKING BACK

We can show a narrative sequence for the entire chapter:



This chapter is about the command of the superior and obedience toward him. Listening is its fundamental stance. Obedience in love must be given willingly, and Benedict interprets this as the way in which the monk "imitates" Christ. If he obeys hesitantly and slowly, Benedict thinks that self-will has stepped in as a disruption. Obeying immediately, following Christ, is a narrow way that leads to life, yet under one condition: that we do it in a good disposition and with joy. Obedience does not lead to life if we give it with

37. Cf. Augustine, *De corr* 8.17: *voluntas quippe humana non libertate consequitur gratiam, sed graia potius libertatem* ("for the human will does not achieve grace through liberty, but through grace, liberty").

grumbling and only superficially. We could further pursue the thought that, through punishment, some improvement in a positive direction is possible; otherwise, the subsequent progression will lead farther down to the negative.

It is meaningful to write down all the scriptural quotes in sequence. They too form a chiasm that corresponds to the one of the entire chapter.

5 As soon as he heard me, he obeyed me (Ps 18:45)
6 Whoever listens to you, listens to me (Luke 10:16)

11 Narrow is the road that leads to life (Matt 7:14)
13 I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me (John 6:38)

15 Whoever listens to you, listens to me (Luke 10:16)
16 God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7)

It is striking that five of the six quotes are taken from the New Testament and four from the gospels.[38] Apparently monastic obedience cannot be described without the imitation of Christ, without close affiliation with Christ. Obedience lives in the belief that Christ conveys his word through human mediators, that even difficulties are not an antithesis to obedience but quite the opposite. Obedience also means to insert ourselves into Christ's obedience to the Father for the sake of the world. And finally, obedience is a joyful and thus free gift to God.

38. Something similar is repeated in the second and third steps of humility, which deal with obedience and also use quotes from the New Testament. The other steps are predominantly shaped by the psalms, and steps 9–11 by texts from wisdom books.

Chapter 6

On Keeping Silent[1]

TODAY'S CONTEXT[2]

This chapter deals with silence as well as with keeping silence. Both are connected with solitude, recollection, quiet, and peace but also with renunciation and, above all, love. On the opposite side, we have noise, talkativeness, roaring laughter, superficiality, but also icy silence.

It is probably not an exaggeration when we say that we are living in a time of noise pollution, and we experience the aggression of noise, particularly when living in a city. Whoever desires to be heard, as, e.g., police cars and ambulances, has to use special noise signals so they can stand out against the background. We also are living in a time when the tiniest gadgets produce music and sounds. Almost everywhere there are sounds, and where there are no sounds people sometimes feel uncomfortable and insecure. Often they try to escape the silence.

We experience talkativeness in all areas. Just think of political speeches! Or the so-called news that actually is no longer news, the many modern means of communication that no longer communicate but rather manipulate, and words that are no longer used to convey the truth or facts but rather to conceal them! I remember the words of a young woman: "I have talked, talked

1. German has two words for silence: *Schweigen*, meaning "silence," and *Schweigsamkeit*, which means that someone is not talkative (either always or just according to a specific situation) or doesn't speak too much or too early; this can be translated by taciturnity. The author uses *Schweigsamkeit* for the title of RB 6 and also throughout the chapter on RB 6. I decided to use the English expression "keeping silent/silence" in many places as it is closer to the behavior that Benedict describes in RB 6. —Trans.

2. This context provides only a rough sketch and is to be supplemented by actual experiences.

so much, but in truth I did it in order to erect walls around myself." In the depth of her heart she refused to let anyone approach her.

With regard to laughter I found an interesting article by Sieglinde Geisel who refers to a passage in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* that discusses a book about laughter that is not to be discovered. Laughter is described as a subversive power that can also be a sharp weapon. There is a devilish laughter that belittles everything that is holy. Geisel lists three areas where laughter has this negative power: first, in tendentious jokes that are a substitute for satisfying forbidden impulses and also can serve to satisfy a lascivious or hostile urge. By using such jokes we can bypass our sense of shame and live out concupiscent desires with pleasure. In this area bodily laughter (as opposed to a heartfelt laughter) is an unruly frolicking and signifies loss of all control. A person can no longer contain him- or herself; rational and carnal inhibitions cease. We can think of lewd jokes, especially those involving sexuality.

Furthermore, laughter can also be directed against others. In German we have the word *auslachen*, meaning to laugh at a person by making someone the butt of our jokes, poking fun at him or her. This means we distance ourselves from that person, and feelings of sympathy or compassion are set aside. Yet as soon as we are able to empathize with someone, we will no longer be able to laugh about this person. We may also think of jokes in authoritarian states about members of the church—a weapon that is able to destroy a person's reputation. Laughter can cut out the ground from under another's feet so that she or he becomes a plaything. This is not laughing together but rather laughing against each other. A roaring laughter eventually also destroys the sphere of the holy. Those who laugh do not believe in whatever they laugh at. Reverence, adoration, and respect are destroyed. Laughter is also connected with a feeling of superiority. All this is, however, only a phenomenology of uncontrolled laughter, not of laughter that comes from the heart.

Silence also is opposed to icy isolation through which people can express negative feelings. In passive aggression and bitterness someone withdraws into him- or herself, becomes stony and closed off, is hostile toward others. Such an attitude can hurt as much, or more, than talkativeness. Moreover, our Western culture is characterized by isolation and growing loneliness. Just think of the lives of so many older people, but isolation is also not foreign to youth.

So far we have listed four contrasts to quiet and keeping silence: thoughtless talkativeness, laughing at people spitefully and tendentious jokes, a constant low level of noise, and aggressive isolation. Thus we could say that our times are not favorable to the values that shine through silence and taciturnity. On the other hand, it is noteworthy how many books and articles deal with this very topic, and this is apparently an indication that they address at least a hidden yearning.

At the same time we experience the inability to be alone, to be silent. We long for it but also fear it. Solitude is the opposite of isolation. "Only the school of solitude can free us from isolation. Only true solitude enables us to have relationships, enables us to accept the others in their otherness and uniqueness."[3] Silence thus also enables listening and good words; silence is the womb for the word.[4] When we are not able to be silent, we also cannot really share ourselves with others and form interpersonal relationships. Dag Hammarskjoeld says that silence is the space surrounding each human community. "Friendship needs no words—it is solitude delivered from the anguish of loneliness."[5] Nouwen says: "In our chatty society silence has become something . . . that is feared, . . . evokes in most people disquiet and nervousness . . . as they experience it as emptiness and hollowness, . . . as a yawning abyss."[6]

In meditation groups we slowly learn to quiet ourselves, and techniques exist for learning it. Yet the deeper recollection does not depend solely on techniques but is an inner attitude that is based in our being anchored in God. Today the West may perhaps learn something about silence from the East. "Between the silence of the Buddha and the speeches of Jesus there is a deep dialectic of complementarity, and perhaps the salvation of our future world depends on their being synthesized. . . . The Christian Occident needs to consider the invitation of the East to silent contemplation. We must re-learn the discipline of silence."[7] Here silence and quiet can be synonymous with inner peace! In this sense it may be significant that the Latin word *taciturnus* is connected to the root *tack* or *tvak*, which, according to Wathen, means to become quiet, content, being at rest, contented, becoming one.[8] I experienced the most intensive silence when I made a pilgrimage to the Buddha statue in Pulguksa, Korea, together with many students who also kept a deep silence. A growing number of voices express the conviction that the remedy for our Western world may lie in true silence. Create quiet; introduce silence![9]

3. Otger Steggink, "Einsamkeit und Stille oder Spiritualität des Nächsten als Weg zu Gott," *GuL* 54 (1981): 36–43, at 40.

4. Wathen, "Word," 197.

5. Böckmann says that this quote comes from the German translation of *Markings* (German: *Zeichen am Weg*), 25. I was unable to find it in the English translation but found it among the Hammarskjoeld quotes on the website *BrainyQuotes*, though without a bibliographical reference. —Trans.

6. Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 59.

7. Quoted in the article "Silence" by W. Kurtz in *Praktisches Lexikon der Spiritualität* (1988), 1109.

8. Wathen, "Word," 200.

9. Cf. Otto Betz, "'Ausgesetzt auf den Bergen des Herzens.' Vom Sinn der Einsamkeit," *GuL* 66 (1993): 242–48, at 247.

In the context of the church and in liturgy we also note a superabundance of words and speeches. Again and again we encounter a longing for more silence. Nouwen even says: "The crisis of theological studies is first and foremost a crisis of the word. . . . When our words are no longer an echo of the divine word. . . . In earlier times theology was usually studied in monasteries where the word emerged out of silence and then could lead into an even deeper silence."[10]

Before the Second Vatican Council religious communities generally had set rules for silence, and it is possible that this may at times have negatively affected interpersonal relationships as well as a loving relationship with the poor and with suffering people. Today the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. We now have few rules about silence and emphasize above all human contact, dialogue, love—these are all values that are in danger to become superficial when there is neither silence nor solitude. As a matter of fact, silence has come into such disrepute that we often need to add an adjective, e.g., *true* silence, in order to be understood. The demand for more silence is generally voiced in many community meetings, but we have a hard time taking some concrete actions. Once the rules for silence have been discontinued, it is almost impossible to reintroduce them in a positive way. Often we hear of life in small communities where people are exposed to each other from early morning to late at night. To provide a counterbalance each member is, for example, encouraged to spend one day per week outside the house so that she or he may again be her- or himself. In earlier times we had silence that provided a proper space for every person who then was more able to be open to the other. Apparently, we need structures that support silence again. Silence is a counterculture and might be a true gift for our own time. In the words of Nouwen: "Would it not be . . . important to transform gently and carefully the empty silence into a fulfilled one, the fearful into a peaceful one and the restless one into a silence that can give us rest so that in this transformed silence a real encounter with the loving father may happen? . . . Silence is first a quality of the heart that leads to an ever growing love."[11]

CONTEXT IN BENEDICT'S TIME

In the historical context of Benedict there certainly was no such flood of words and images as we have it today, even though in a time of many wars neither calm nor inner peace could be taken for granted. In a time of great

10. Nouwen, *Way of the Heart*, 47f.
11. Ibid., 60, 64.

confusion it was probably important to recollect the inner strengths in order to establish something that would continue into the future.

In the *monastic* context we find a great esteem for silence everywhere. The *Desert Fathers* appreciated both external and internal quiet (*quies*, *hesychia*). Generally they withdrew into quiet and lonely areas. Silence was seen as necessary, especially at the beginning of monastic life: "Arsenius, flee, be silent and quiet for these are the sources of sinlessness."[12] If *monachus* signifies to be one, then the importance of silence is clear so that the restless voices inside and outside can be quieted. An important tool for doing this is to guard one's tongue.

The monk Pambo went to see his spiritual father in order to learn a psalm. After having heard the first verse of Psalm 38/39—"I will watch my ways lest I sin with my tongue"—he no longer wanted to hear more, withdrew, and said: "This one verse is enough for me if I have the strength to put it into practice." Six months later Pambo did not come to his Master who reprimanded him. But Pambo answered: "I have not yet learned to practice the first verse." Many years later a friend asked him if by now he had learned his verse. Pambo said: "In nineteen years I have barely learned to practice it."[13] This requires a strong discipline that is not easy. It was said about Abba Agathon that for three years he carried a stone in his mouth until he had learned to keep silence.[14] We are always sinning anew. Sisoes said: "For thirty years I have not prayed to God about my faults, but I have made this prayer to him: 'Lord Jesus, save me from my tongue' and until now every day, I fall because of it, and commit sin."[15]

Keeping silence also means not to judge. When we are silent we know we stand before God and do not make comparisons.[16] The abba even teaches by being silent.[17] Yet we also know that external silence alone is not sufficient. The following saying is characteristic: "He also said, 'A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others he is babbling ceaselessly. But

12. *Alph*, Arsenius 2.

13. *Alph*, Pambo Ps 38:2, after Louis Leloir, "La lecture l'Ecriture selon les anciens Pères," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 47 (1971): 183; Leloir also quotes Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* IV.23.22; cf. also *Alph*, Antonius 18.

14. *Alph*, Agathon 15.

15. *Alph*, Sisoes 5.

16. *Alph*, Bessarion 10: "A brother who shared a lodging with other brothers asked Abba Bessarion, 'What should I do?' The old man replied, 'Keep silence and do not compare yourself with others.'" Cf. also *Alph*, Euprepius 7.

17. *Alph*, Antonius 27; cf. also *Alph*, Theophilus 2; *VitPat* VII.30.2: "If we were willing to keep silent, he said, just the example is sufficient for the neighbor."

there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent; that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.'"[18]

The early cenobitic rules contain rules regarding places and times of silence. For Pachomius silence allows listening to the word of God.[19] When describing the various daily activities it is mentioned that texts from Sacred Scripture are recited while the brothers keep silence about anything else. Certain places and times have a particular need for silence: the table, the refectory, the places of manual labor, the liturgy, and the night.[20] When brothers do speak they are to avoid any worldly topics.[21] Laughter is prohibited.[22] Punishment is meted out not only to those who speak against the brothers but also to those who joke in an indecent manner.[23]

Basil distinguishes between the joy of the heart that is a sign of wisdom, and laughter as a sign of foolishness and of forgetting that we are sinners. Keeping silent is necessary in order to fight against sins. When we do speak, it is to be useful and edifying for others.[24] We are to learn to speak fittingly, at the appropriate time, and positively.

"Even in laughing we are to be abstemious. . . . To give oneself to uncontrolled and unruly laughter is a sign of intemperance. It proves a lack of self-discipline and shows that the ability of the soul is not strictly dominated by reason. Yet it is in no way improper to show the soul's relaxation in a gentle smile. Scripture says: 'A glad heart lights up the face' (Prov 15:13). But laughing out loud so that the entire person shakes involuntarily is not fitting for a quiet disposition or for those who are thoughtful and enjoy self-discipline. . . . The Lord . . . was tired and had compassion for those who were mourning; yet he never laughed . . . but rather spoke his woe about those who are laughing (Luke 6:25). . . . Scripture often mentions the hilarity of the soul and the joy when laughing about a good thing."[25] Basil also quotes

18. *Alph*, Poemen 27; also 147: "The one who speaks because of God, does well; the one who is silent because of God, also does well." And 84: "If you are silent, you will have peace wherever you live."

19. *Praec* 31, 33, 34, 60, 116.

20. *Praec* 88.

21. *Praec* 60; about tales (*fabulae*), *Praec* 116; and one is not to speak of what one has seen outside the monastery, *Praec* 57; 85f.

22. *Praec* 31; 121.

23. *Praec Inst.* 10.

24. Basil, *Reg* 8.30f. in the context of 8.26-37; 53; cf. also 136, repeated in *Regbrev* 208. "Is it appropriate to be always silent? Whether silence is appropriate depends on the time and the person. . . ." On the time when Scripture says "I keep a guard on my mouth as long as the wicked man is before me" (Ps 38:2). Cf. 1 Cor 14:30; Eph 4.29; cf. also PsBasil, *Adm* 16f.

25. *Regfus* 17.1; *Reg* 8.26-37.

the verse of Psalm 38/39:2 "I set a guard on my mouth. . . . I was silent and humbled myself and was silent even of good things."[26]

For Cassian silence is the presupposition for pure prayer. In prayer too there is silence, the mysterious *taciturnitas*. In the cenobitic community there is silence during manual labor and meals and especially in the oratory. A novice is to recite the verse of Psalm 38/39:2 to himself.[27] External silence is not sufficient, for it can be an indication of pride, as is talkativeness, loud speaking, and uncontrolled laughter. For Cassian laughing belongs to the passions of the flesh and of sexuality and evokes sexual temptations; it occurs in lists between drunkenness and stealing.[28]

In later monastic history silence is also seen as very important, but perhaps its practice was very difficult for uncivilized tribes. Thus we often find pictures of Benedict in which he puts his finger on his mouth and has a whip in his hand. In this respect it would be interesting to pursue a history of interpretations of silence after RB as expressed in commentaries but also in customs and declarations added to the Rule. This, however, would go beyond the purpose of an exegetical commentary.

RM—RB

Benedict depends on RM, which developed its anthropology particularly in the chapter on silence. Here we first present a schema in which "+RM" indicates texts of the Master that Benedict did not use, "BM" texts that are common to both Rules, and "+RB" texts that Benedict added to RM.

+RM	BM	+RB
8.1-30: anthropological treatise		
8.31-33: heart-soul-eyes-mouth	→ 6.1-3: keeping silence (Ps 38:2)	
8.34-37: details	→ 6.4-5	

26. *Regfus* 136.2.
27. Cassian, *Inst.* IV.41.2; cf. *Conf.* XVI.26.2.
28. Casssian, *Inst.* XII.27.5f.; XII.29.2; C*onf.* IV.20.3; also IX.3.1.

9.1-50: questions to superior, gestures, blessings; not speaking in the presence of the abbot		6.7: questions to the superior
9.51	→ 6.8: prohibition of silly talk and thoughtless words	

It is evident that Benedict barely adds texts of his own, generally shortens the text of RM, and omits its casuistry. In the anthropological treatise in 8.1-30 we read that "the flesh of our poor little body is a sort of lodging for the soul" (8.6) and that "whatever stirs and moves in us is the soul acting in the body" (8.11). It is the soul that creates the seeing of the eyes, the speaking of the mouth and the hearing of the ears. They are, as it were, branches of our body that serve the commandments of the heart. These "exits" must be well guarded, and with this the Master comes to the closing of the mouth and silence.

RM 9 prohibits the brothers to speak in the presence of the abbot or to ask him questions. They are to say *benedicite* while making a deep bow. If the abbot does not give permission to speak, the monk may repeat the request for a blessing, but only once, no more. This is to test his humility. Toward the end we read in 9.27: "All this is necessary for the soul for God's sake. We have set up such a strict cloister of silence so that no one be easily tempted to forget it and no one ever be overeager with his tongue."[29] When the abbot is not present, the pupils may speak of pious topics or recite Scripture texts by heart so as not to forget God.

We see that Benedict's text comes almost entirely from RM, yet from two long chapters in RM he creates a short one of only eight verses. He omits the entire anthropological treatise, which agrees with the observation that he generally omits theoretical texts. The first word in the chapter is proper to Benedict: "Let us do what the prophet says" rather than only "Let us say with the prophet: I said . . ." (RM 8.31 and RB 6.1). The textual similarities continue until 6.6, then Benedict summarizes on his own fifty verses of RM—dealing with questions to the superior, keeping silence in his presence, and the many connected rites—into one single verse; he concludes by using

29. The author always quotes from the Latin text; yet Eberle's translation is here quite different.

the last verse of RM (9.51) about prohibiting vulgarities (with some changes) as the end of his only chapter dealing with silence.

This already shows that Benedict is far less theoretical, less dualistic, but equally radical as RM; in addition, he parts company with the casuistry of RM.

DIRECT CONTEXT

We presume that Benedict's Rule was written for a community where there was much joking, thoughtless laughing, and talking. In addition, we have to think of many younger monks (see the many negative expressions!). We notice that Benedict is rather annoyed with thoughtless talking.

OVERVIEW OF RB 6

In harmony with its logical structure the chapter begins in verse 1 with a scriptural quote from a wisdom psalm. Verse 2 contains a first application, "Here" (*hic*), and verse 3 a particular deduction beginning with "therefore" (*ergo*). This second deduction contains two reasons (*quia*) from Sacred Scripture in verses 4-5. Verse 6, connected by "for" (*nam*), is directed very concretely to the relationship between master and student. And verse 7, with "therefore" (*ideo*), draws the conclusion. Verse 8, connected by *ergo*, is very radical, apparently a logical conclusion of the entire chapter.

We might also see an inclusion from the first to the last word. The first word is *faciamus* ("let us do"; differing from the tradition); the last is *non permittimus* ("we do not allow"; a negative expression). This is the starkest contrast: guarding the tongue in verse 1 and prohibition of vulgarities in verse 8.

We also can write the text in columns:

RB 6: ON KEEPING SILENT

RB 6	On Keeping Silent
	"I said: I will watch my ways
so as not to sin with my tongue.	

I set a guard
on my mouth,
I became mute
and humbled
myself

and was silent
about good
things"
(Ps 38/39:2-3).

[2]Here the
prophet shows
that, if

we sometimes
are to refrain
from speaking
good words

on account of
keeping silent,

how much
more are we to
avoid evil words
due to fear of
punishment for
sin.

[3]Therefore, even

for good and
holy and edifying
conversations,

due to the
importance of
keeping silent,
only rarely
permission is to
be given

to perfect
disciples,

[4]for it is written			
	"in speaking much you will not escape sin" (Prov 10:19).		
[5]And elsewhere:	"Death . . .		and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov 18:21).
[6]For	keeping silent and listening is fitting for the disciple.		Speaking and teaching is for the Master.
[7]And thus, if			something is to be asked of the superior
		it is to be asked with all humility and respectful submission.	
[8]But	vulgar jokes and idle talk aimed at arousing laughter, we condemn in all places and that the disciple open his mouth and say them,		
we do not allow.			

The first small column contains the introduction of the sentences and the sources. Almost the entire chapter is based on Sacred Scripture: the prophet says, the prophet shows, it is written, and elsewhere. Four direct references. Looking at these Scripture texts, we see that they all come from wisdom literature (Proverbs and a wisdom psalm, 38/39).

The third column contains the expressions for the ideal, and the first partial verse might even be seen as title. It is interesting to note that the verse begins with speaking ("I said"; *dixi*); absolute silence, thus, does not seem to be the ideal. "I will watch my ways" (*custodiam*): the emphasis is on heedfulness, attention. The psalm uses the same Latin word again (*custodire*) when saying "I put a guard on my mouth, I was silent and humbled myself." Keeping silent has to do with humility.

The second column contains the sins. It is also part of keeping silent that we are silent even about good things (fourth column).

How does the thought process develop? The ideal is mentioned as title (third column at the top), then moves from the evil that is to be avoided (second column) to the ideal (third column) and only then to the maximum on the positive side (fourth column). This last part is taken up in verse 2, which then proceeds right to the ideal and "how much more are we to avoid evil words." A similar statement repeats this (connected by "therefore"; *ergo*), yet more explicitly and even more radically. Starting with verse 5 the perspective changes: the emphasis is on evil speech (first column) and good speech (fourth column), or good listening and asking (third column).

TITLE: ON KEEPING SILENT (*DE TACITURNITATE*)

In this chapter the semantic field of being silent and of speaking is, according to the title, rather extensive, and for this reason it is discussed first. We find the Latin words *tacere*, *taciturnitas* (perhaps *humiliatus*, *humilitas*), *silere*, *audire* (be silent, keep silence, to humble oneself, humility, to become mute, listen). As contrast we have the words: *multiloquium*, *scurrilitas*, *otiosus*, *risus*, *loqui*, *verbum*, *lingua*, *eloquium* (talkativeness, jokes, idle, laughter, speak, word, tongue).

Looking at the manner in which Benedict uses the word *tacere* and its derivatives, we can conclude that its meaning is deeper than *silere* (to be silent) and actually designates an attitude that may even include some useful words (RB 42.9-10). Perhaps A. Wathen is correct when he translates it with "being at rest, at peace with himself."[30] A person has moved beyond fragmentation and has found unity in himself. The person is at rest, and thus this state might be connected with inner rest in the sense of *hesychia*. This is a virtue of wisdom that is represented on many Buddhist temples, where they represent the various phases of human life from struggle with passions all the way to a person's hilarity and unity. Benedict uses the word *taciturnitas* in connection with silence in this chapter, in the next one, and

30. Wathen, "Word," 200f.

once also in 42.9 yet continues to use *silentium* in the texts that are proper to him.[31] In all these texts the word "silence" also contains an external discipline with regard to others.

V. 1: Let us do what the prophet says: "I said: I will watch my ways so as not to sin with my tongue. I set a guard on my mouth, I became mute and humbled myself and was silent about good things." (*Faciamus quod ait propheta: "Dixi: custodiam vias meas, ut non delinquam in lingua mea. Posui ori meo custodiam. Obmutui et humiliatus sum et silui a bonis" [Ps 38/39:1]*.)

As already seen, in his energetic manner Benedict thinks that we are to translate this psalm verse into practice; he says this in contrast to monastic practice. In RM the verse is *said*, in Cassian monks are to *meditate* on it,[32] in the Rule of Basil the verse is said by Scripture,[33] and in a patristic saying Pambo is learning it in order to put it into practice (see p. 103). With even greater clarity RM says: "he says with the prophet" (*dicens cum propheta*; 9.31), that is, the monk is trying to make these words his own. Yet Benedict lets the words challenge the monk to act: "Let us do what the prophet says" (the Latin word *ait* is typical for Benedict). In RB the prophet is usually the psalmist, with just some rare exceptions. The reasons for this probably lie in the fact that the psalms were seen as Davidic, that our authors use mainly the psalms attributed to David, but also because they are prophetic exhortations for our situation.[34]

I will watch my ways (*custodiam vias meas*). The human person is on a journey; thus the first focus is not on the tongue. "To watch my ways" is interpreted in Hildemar (199) and Smaragdus (258f.) as keeping watch on our actions. In RB *custodia* designates attentiveness, care, but also control (63.19; 70.4) and that we protect something precious (65.11). The verse in the psalm also says, "as long as the sinner faces me,"[35] and thus admonishes us not to get lost in polemics. RM and RB omit this as Cassian had already done. Presumably the point is not to know that we are facing sinners but rather to confess that we ourselves are sinners. Patristic authors might also use this as admonition that, like Jesus, we are to be silent when facing accusers. Augustine quotes this verse very often, but it also occurs in Ambrose

31. See 38.5; 42.1; 48.5; 52.2.

32. *Inst.* IV.41.2.

33. *Reg* 136.2; cf. also Ambrose, *De off* 1.7: a call to listen and to follow the ways of the Lord: "Let us hear . . . the teacher: I said . . ."

34. Cf. Böckmann, "Die *Regula*," 612.

35. Cf. Basil, *Reg* 136.2; Origen, *In Ps.* 38.I.3.

and Jerome, usually in its full form (as long as the evil one is against me). Yet RM and RB omitted these expressions.

So as not to sin with my tongue (*ut non delinquam in lingua mea*). This partial verse contains an old and simple truth that is often repeated in monastic literature (cf. RB 6.4). The tongue seems to be dangerous as is emphasized in the letter of James (3:2-13).

I set a guard on my mouth (*posui ori meo custodiam*). We may remember that the Master designates the teeth very concretely as a barrier that keep the words from reaching the outside. In 6.8 there is a similar expression that vulgarities are to be condemned to an "eternal enclosure" (*aeterna clausura*). RM described this *clausura* as the teeth: "When some sin arises from the root of the heart and sees that its exit is blocked by the enclosure of the outside wall, namely, the mouth and the teeth" (8.22) Furthermore the Master says that speaking is "opening the enclosure" (*taciturnis . . . clausura*; 9.10*)*.[36] In itself the "guard" does not say that no words come out of the mouth but only that the words are observed, weighed, and sorted. The word also occurs in Sirach 22:33 (in Latin and Greek text, otherwise 22:27). Smaragdus interprets this passage in the sense that the person admits that "he is not just, but—and this is very true—a sinner" (259).

I was silent and humbled myself (*Obmutui et humiliatus sum*). The same words occur once again in verse 10 of this pslam: "I was silent and did not open my mouth" (*obmutui et non aperui os meum*). The word *obmutui* (rare in the Latin Bible) appears also in the fourth Song of the Servant, who is "like a lamb that becomes mute before the shearers" (Isa 53:7). A person does not defend himself, remains recollected, bows down to the earth (*humiliatus sum*). This points to the connection to humility (6.7). Just as in 6.6, there is a connection to obedience. We may also think of the earlier monastic custom not to defend ourselves when being accused (this is a possible allusion to Isa 53:7 and to Christ in his passion). In fact, no word comes out of our mouth. We are silent, become quiet. "I humbled myself." In Latin we have the word *humiliatus*, the root of which is *humus*, earth. I am earth, rooted in earth. This becomes an internal process as I go into myself and begin to see what I am in truth when standing before almighty God. This then leads me to pay attention to what the Lord perhaps might say to me in this situation.

I was silent about good things (*et silui a bonis*). Those who want to share everything good that arises in them become talkative and eventually garrulous. Here the emphasis is on discretion, on recollection, and on the fact that when words are born out of silence they are authentic. (Cf. the above-mentioned saying about Pambo [p. 103].) Evidently the quote from Psalm 38/39 was

36. Cf. 8.25: *furem clusura cathenae . . . refrenant*. Also 9.27f.

much liked. Translations based on the Hebrew do not have the part about "I was silent about good things," as does the Vulgate and the *Psalterium Romanum*, but rather translate according to the literal sense: "fortune has left me." Monastic literature, however, loves the version *silui a bonis* and relates this to the good words that are not said.

V. 2: Here the prophet shows that, if we sometimes are to refrain from speaking good words on account of keeping silent, how much more are we to avoid evil words on account of punishment for sin. (*Hic ostendit propheta, si a bonis eloquiis interdum propter taciturnitatem debet taceri, quanto magis a malis verbis propter poenam peccati debet cessari.*)

Benedict begins with the last expression of the psalm and then proceeds to the second before last, thus taking the reverse path. Apparently he (and the Master) were particularly impressed by the silence about good things. If this is right, then all the more silence about evil things. This thought is then repeated a second time with ever sharper expressions (proof *a fortiori*).

Yet neither Rule says that we are to forego speaking of good things altogether, but only now and then. And this is done because of keeping silent (*taciturnitas*), keeping inner peace, and recollection—and we certainly see this also as a relief for the community. James 1:19 admonished Christians to be quick to hear and slow to speak (and slow to anger). It is clear that restraint in speaking also helps to avoid evil words. Benedict and his source here use as motivation the punishment for sins, which was considered an important motivation for the first step into the spiritual life.

Vv. 3-4: Therefore, even for good and holy and edifying conversations, permission is given to perfect disciples only rarely on account of the importance of keeping silent; for it is written: "In speaking much you will not escape sin." (*Ergo, quamvis de bonis et sanctis et aedificationum eloquiis, perfectis discipulis propter taciturnitatis gravitatem rara loquendi concedatur licentia, quia scriptum est: "In multiloquio non effugies peccatum" [Prov 10:19]*)

In the original text Benedict's sentence is incomplete. In the Rule of the Master the thought proceeds as follows: "Therefore, although permission to engage in good and holy and edifying conversation may be granted to perfect disciples though rarely. Yet with regard to other kinds of speaking . . ." (8.33-34; see below). We can see that the text of RM is earlier; Benedict shortened it, but not very well.

Good and holy and edifying conversations (*de bonis et sanctis et aedificationum eloquiis*). We might think that such conversation would be allowed. Yet we need to remember that the immediate context of the Rule is a community

of persons who are (too) ready to talk and perhaps may be inexperienced in the spiritual life. Someone may like to share his experiences and knowledge in detail, assuming it may edify others. We can think of talkativeness in certain renewal movements or of many a bad habit to preach to others. Besides, Benedict apparently has negative experiences of "holy" conversations. It is significant that in the eleventh step of humility, which he otherwise copies from RM, he changes this expression into "reasonable conversations."

The word *aedificatio* is used in the genitive plural in the sense of conversations with an edifying content; perhaps this already indicates that many kinds of things are being said and that there is simply too much. For in other passages of RB *aedificatio* is always mentioned in the singular and in connection with Sacred Scripture.[37] A word of edification makes us sit up and listen and reminds us of Basil, who says that "the beginners are to be totally silent until they are healed of the disease of rash speech and in seclusion have learned when, what and how they are to speak so that—as is written—it may be blessing for the listeners."[38]

Perfect disciples (*perfectis discipulis*). This is the only time that Benedict took this expression from RM. As already seen, Benedict foregoes making any distinction between perfect and imperfect disciples, e.g., in connection with obedience. In RM it is precisely the perfect disciple who rarely speaks, especially when the abbot is present (8.34f.). In chapter 9 RM has once again the expressions "the perfect disciple," "those who have a pure heart," "who are already spiritually advanced," and of them is said three times that they do not speak because they want to hear the Master, or because they fear the fire of hell and do not want to sin (9.37f., 41, 46f.) With regard to RM Kardong says in his commentary: "Spiritual progress does not bring with it freedom" (121). I agree with him, but then we also have to continue by saying that Benedict here follows the Master too uncritically. As mentioned above, the word "disciple" is—with one exception—used only when he depends on RM.

Only rarely is permission to speak given to them (*rara loquendi concedatur licentia*)—this is in full agreement with RM. Still, they are allowed to speak a few times. What is lacking here is the inner freedom that we saw in the Desert Fathers. Out of inner freedom and deep recollection one is free to speak or to remain silent, depending on what is useful for the other (cf. also RB 42.9-11). We would actually assume that especially the perfect disciple ought to speak because this might edify others. Yet here in the chapters that depend on RM, in fact, only the Master is allowed to speak, and the disciple listens. The community is not yet in the center. When we look at such a sentence

37. 38.9; also 38.12; 42.3; 47.3; 53.9.

38. *Reg* 136.3-5; before this he quotes Eph 4:29.

within the entire Rule, then it is clear: we are to speak whatever and whenever it is useful for someone else (72.7). Within RB there is a development.[39] We even could point to a contrast between this verse and, for instance, the encouragement that the brothers are to give to each other when getting up in the morning (22.8) or the good words that the cellarer (who is, we hope, a perfect disciple) says to the brothers (31.13, also 31.7).

On account of the importance of keeping silent (*propter taciturnitatis gravitatem*). Even with this extreme demand Benedict does not mention the imitation of Christ as motivation but rather as a principle from wisdom, that is, how he and RM explain the wisdom psalm 38/39. Inner peace and being unified with God and oneself in silence has such importance that being on one's guard is particularly necessary. Sirach 20:6 emphasizes: "A wise man is silent till the right time comes." The word *gravitas* is connected to the scale: the weight pulls down and has a great effect.[40] We can trust the words. In monasticism *gravitas* designates a dignified attitude and inner stability. As contrast, we have the superficial and thoughtless words.

In his Rule Benedict in general favors *gravitas*. Might it come from his birthplace or rather from Roman culture in general? I hold the latter as more probable. The brothers are to anticipate each other in *gravitas* when going to the Vigil (22.6), and even going speedily to the work of God during the day is to be done *cum gravitate* (43.2). When after Compline someone needs to speak (the *regula taciturnitatis* is mentioned, 42.9), it is to be done with utmost *gravitas* and *moderatione honestissima*, most respectful moderation (42.11). The service of the reader is done with humility and *cum gravitate* (47.4). Here and in RB 7.60 it is not the monks directly but rather their silence or their words that need to have this quality. In the expression of RB 6.3 we might perhaps think that the silence—*taciturnitas*—lets us sink into the depth. It has been shown that RM and presumably also RB here depend less on the Roman ambiance than on Cassian, who often mentions this attitude. Vogüé relies on Cassian in his translation: "on account of the silence full of gravity, of seriousness."[41]

After this verse the Master had two more verses that were logically connected: "brothers who have not been asked anything should suppress in silence [*in taciturnitate silescant*] talk of any other kind until the curb on their muted mouth has been removed by a question from the abbot. To repeat, silence

39. Wathen shows this too in his book *Silence*.

40. Art. "Gravitas," *RAC*; also interesting but not as compelling is Fracheboud, "S. Benoît."

41. Cassian, *Inst.* XI.4, *gravitate taciturnitatis elidit*. Cf. also several passages listed in "Gravitas," *RAC*, 771.

[*taciturnitas*] must be most carefully kept by the brothers because . . . " (8.34f.). This refers to the casuistry of speaking in the presence of the abbot. What follows is also seen in RB 6.4. In this chapter Benedict does not directly mention the abbot but a "superior" (*prior*).

For it is written: "*In speaking much you will not escape sin*" (*quia scriptum est: "In multiloquio non effugies peccatum."*). Benedict and RM desire to take their direction from wisdom literature in the well-known principle that whoever talks much easily slides into sin; we cannot escape it. Benedict, however, explicitly adds that "it is written." Here the word "talkativeness" (*multiloquium*) appears for the first time. This sentence is repeated almost verbatim in the ninth step of humility. Benedict and the Master also wish that such talkativeness be avoided in prayer (RB 20.3; RM 48.5). In the Latin Vulgate this word occurs only in this Scripture quote (Prov 10:19) and in Jesus' teaching on prayer stating that the pagans think to be heard because of their talkativeness (Matt 6:7), thus also as doctrine on prayer.[42] Cassian uses the word only two times: Macarius ended the talkativeness with apostolic brevity for "the kingdom of God does not exist in the word, but in power" (1 Cor 4:20), and a second time he describes empty talk (*vaniloquia*) as *multiloquia* and, together with *scurrilitas* (buffoonery), as enemies of prayer.[43]

You will not escape sin (*non effugies peccatum*). Sin is seen almost as a person from whom one has to run away. Benedict changes this quote into the second-person singular and thus directs it directly to the monk (RM: *effugiatur* third-person singular). This text from Proverbs 10:19 is quoted very frequently by Ambrose and Augustine—it is a commonplace!

V. 5. And elsewhere:"Death . . . and life are in the power of the tongue." (*et alibi: "Mors et vita in manibus linguae" [Prov 18:21].*)

Here Benedict changes a word so that his text now says "and elsewhere," for the quote is from a different chapter in Proverbs. This is a small indication that RB does not simply add individual Bible quotes out of context without knowing the context whence they come (cf., e.g., 27.3-4). We remember James 3:2-10: "If anyone does not fall short in speech, he is a perfect man, able to bridle his whole body also. . . . The tongue is also a fire . . . a world of malice, defiling the whole body and setting the entire course of our lives on fire. . . . No human being can tame the tongue. . . . With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings. . . . From the same mouth come blessing and curse." The metaphor "the hands of the tongue"

42. Vulg, Prov 10:19: *in multiloquio non deerit peccatum*; Matt 6:7: . . . *ethnici. Putant enim quod in multiloquio suo exaudiantur*.

43. *Conf.* XV.3.2; and *Conf.* IX.3.1.

is interesting. This too is a commonplace in Augustine and is also used by Jerome and Caesarius. Death is in the hands of the tongue, but it is consoling that life, too, is in the hands of the tongue. Thus starting with verse 5 the perspective of the chapter is being changed as it deals with talking that conveys life as opposed to talking that is sin and has negative effects.[44]

The fact that speaking can convey life is given very little emphasis, at least in this chapter. As counterbalance we might think of some texts from the second part of the Rule containing words like "console" (27.3), the "good words" in 31.13, and that the brothers are "quietly to encourage each other" in 22.8, or the healing word of the *senpectae* in 27.2-3.

V. 6: For speaking and teaching is fitting for the Master; keeping silent and listening is fitting for the disciple. (*Nam loqui et docere magistrum condecet, tacere et audire discipulum convenit.*)

This is the end of chapter 8 in RM, where the two sides are now called "disciple—master." With one exception Benedict uses the word "disciple" only when he depends on RM; we may confidently say that it is not among his favorite words. After RB 6 he uses it only one more time; in RB 7 he always changes the word "disciple" into another one. Similarly Benedict avoids all expressions that smack of school.

The closest parallel to 6.6. is 3.6; here they are written next to each other.

3.6	**6.6**
Yet just as it is proper for disciples	it is fitting for the disciple
to obey their master	to be silent and listen,
so it is	
proper for the master	it is fitting for the master
to arrange everything	to speak and teach
with foresight and fairness.	

In RB 3 Benedict begins with the disciple; in 6.6, with the master. For the master he uses the expression "it is fitting for him" (*condecet*), which seems stronger to me; for the disciples he says "it is proper" (*convenit*). Both expressions, *condecet* and *convenit* appear only in RB 3.6 and 6.6.

Thus we see here a connection between being silent, listening, and obeying. One builds on the other. Yet RB 3 goes further than RB 6, for the disciple

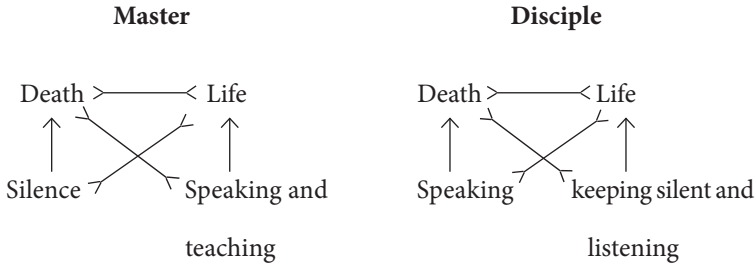
44. Prov 18:21 says, *mors et vita in manu linguae*, though most patristic texts have *in manibus* . . . , cf. Cetedoc I.

has also spoken and was not only silent; because he listened, he was able to give advice and was doing so in humility and obedience. The disciple exercised a function that he is not yet allowed in chapter 6. The word "master" also occurs in RB only until chapter 6, then Benedict no longer uses it. The master speaks and teaches, yet in RB 3 he also is silent and listens. RB 3 shows a later stage in the redaction of the Rule than RB 6, and we may safely assume that 3.6 is to correct the earlier verse in 6.6.

Augustine also once admonished his listeners: "My task in this place is to speak, yours to be silent and listen."[45] A saying of the Fathers states: "Do not act as teacher before it is time, otherwise your insight can only diminish in the remaining years of your life."[46]

As motivation for silence, listening is emphasized, and thus one of Benedict's favorite concepts appears with which the Rule begins (cf. the Prologue that is entirely based on this listening [*audire*]). The Prologue mainly deals with listening to the word of God, and RB 6 deals with listening to the word of God as it is conveyed by human beings. And thus it leads to obedience toward God and human beings. In comparison with RB 5 it is important to note that, here, listening and keeping silent come before obeying, and thus we might be better able to decipher where God addresses us.

We could draw up two semiotic squares, one for the master and one for the disciple. If the master wanted to remain silent, even though he may perhaps sense that a word, born of experience and listening, might help others, then his silence will not be life-giving. And in the other we imagine someone who is learning and has grasped only little; sometimes precisely such persons are so enthusiastic about their first spiritual experiences that they believe they ought to teach others yet do not truly bring life to them.



45 *s.* 211.5.
46 *VitPat* V.15.81.

V. 7: And thus, if something is to be asked of the superior, it is to be asked with all humility and respectful submission. (*Et ideo, si qua requirenda sunt a priore, cum omni humilitate et subiectione reverentiae requirantur.*)

With this one sentence Benedict summarizes RM 9.1-51, which deals with questions and speaking in the presence of the superior. *Prior* designates the first, thus practically the abbot, as Benedict often uses the word. For the person we call prior he uses the word *praepositus* (RB 65). *Requirere* is said of someone who looks for something or someone (7.27; God) or asks a question (which is prohibited during the table reading; 38.5). Thus the initiative comes from the monk himself.

It is to be asked with all humility (*cum omni humilitate*). The next parallel passage is again found in RB 3, a sign that RB was later added as a supplement to RB 6. The brothers offer their advice with all humility of submission (3.4). They know their place and do not presume more than is their due. "With all humility" occurs once more in the chapter on prayer with reference to God (20.2). The expression can show how the relationship to God influences all human relationships. Then Benedict uses it again when describing the behavior toward all guests (53.6), for in them it is Christ who comes. The brothers also practice their crafts with all humility (57.1). It would be worthwhile to examine to what extent Benedict sees humility as indispensable not only in prayer and in the relationship to God but also as it becomes fruitful in mutual relationships, nurtures community, and deepens the apostolate. All the texts mentioned above containing the intensification of humility (all, with all) are proper to Benedict.

And with respectful submission (*subiectione reverentiae*). The *reverentia*, the respect, is directed to God (9.7; 11.3; 20) and to the representatives of Christ, such as the abbot (63.12; 65.16). The word "submission" (*subiectio*) may displease us today; it occurs only here and in 3.4. The fact that the superior is above us and we are below him is respectfully accepted. This says nothing against the equal dignity of everyone. Each person takes his or her seat in this "order" (*ordo*). Yet we need to recognize that all monks elect the superior (64.1-2). The hierarchy of ranks is respected. What is at stake is subordination, eventually also obedience. Here, subordination is seen together with humility (genitive of identity or epexegetical genitive in *subiectione reverentiae*). In RB the word *reverentia* is generally used for an inner attitude both in prayer and in the relationship to superiors,[47] thus not for external ceremonies as in RM 9.1-50.

47. Prayer: e.g., 9.7; 20.T.1; 52.2; in 11.3 together with a rite; toward people in higher ranks: 63.12; 65.16; 6.7; and 60.7.

V. 8: But vulgar jokes and idle talk aimed at arousing laughter, we condemn in all places, and that the disciple open his mouth to say them, we do not allow. (*Scurrilitates vero vel verba otiosa et risum moventia aeterna clausura in omnibus locis damnamus et ad talia eloquia discipulum aperire os non permittimus.*)

With this verse Benedict returns to the last sentence of RM 9.51 and quotes it almost verbatim, yet with significant intensification. We condemn it *in all places*. Thus nowhere in the monastery, not even in secret or in the heart!

The word *scurrilitas* derives from *scurra*, which denotes an idler, a loiterer who uselessly whiles away his time in the city telling inappropriate jokes, a buffoon, a parasite. Buffooneries, exaggeration in jokes—all of this apparently would have occurred frequently in Benedict's community. The Vulgate has the word *scurrilitas* just once, stating that "silly or suggestive talk . . . must not even be mentioned among Christians" (Eph 5:4). The word is listed together with *turpitudo* (immorality or impurity) and *stultiloquium* (foolish or silly talk). Benedict mentions *scurrilitas* twice in a negative sense, here in 6.8 and again in 43.2, that no occasion be given for frivolity. Yet he also uses it in a more neutral sense when saying that, in Lent, we are to deny ourselves something in needless talking and idle jesting (49.7).

We could, however, also see this word as a sign of Benedict's sense of living in a decadent time. If it is impossible to uproot such jesting altogether—as has become clear in the course of time—then it should at least be curtailed during Lent. Cassian is very strict with regard to such joking, which he lists among the carnal vices (*passiones carnales*) together with "immodest speech, lies, perjuries, foolish talk, buffoonery, also with indecency, lewdness, drunkenness and theft, or also with calumny, idle talk and talkativeness. All of these are to be condemned."[48] For Cassian, this expression seems to have a sexual connotation, and the same can be presumed for RB (cf. introduction, [p. 105f.].)

Idle talk (*verba otiosa*). *Otium* means rest, not doing anything, leisure, but also indolence, uselessness, and idleness. Benedict uses it in this last sense.[49] What is at stake are useless, empty words, presumably again ambiguous jokes to which monks may yield when they have some time (cf. 43.8). The Sermon on the Mount emphasizes that we will have to give an account of every useless word (Matt 12:36; *verbum otiosum*; Vulg).

Words that arouse laughter (*verba . . . risum moventia*). This targets even more clearly ambiguous jokes and the sexually charged laughter that follows them (cf. introduction [p. 100]).

48. Cf. the lists in *Conf.* V.16.3; also 16.5; IX.3.1, 3.3; and XII.3.3.
49. Cf. 48.1, 18, 24; 67.4.

For Benedict it is not sufficient to prohibit all this in general; he does not allow it in any place, be it inside or outside (*in omnibus locis*—in all places—is added to the text of RM). And "we condemn" (*damnamus*) is a strong word, which is used only here of human beings, otherwise it is God who condemns (58.18). This word shows Benedict's agitation as well as that of the Master and, in addition, is proof for the fact that they apparently had to deal with monks who liked to indulge in such talk.

The disciple is not to open his mouth to such talk (*at talia eloquia discipulum aperire os suum non permittimus*). It may be that such words stir in a monk's inside, yet if he does not say them out loud, he may yet perhaps still have the possibility to deal with them and to overcome them. RM is very concrete: the thoughts come all the way to the barrier of the teeth, and when they have to remain closed, the thoughts will have to return to the heart and be, as it were, driven away (cf. RM 8.23, *in avortione*). Let us hope that Benedict did not see this as the only means to conquer such thoughts. In other passages he mentions the possibility to reveal them to a spiritual father.[50] The chapter ends with a negative statement: "We do not allow it"—a categorical statement that leaves no doubt.

We need to accept this chapter in all its harshness and perhaps also in its lack of balance. We are not pleased with it. Yet the question must be raised how Benedict deals with all these prohibitions in the course of his Rule, for this is important for the hermeneutical interpretation of RB. It is clear that, in fact, there is more speaking than what RB 6 leads us to suspect.

As motivation for keeping silent, we see in RB 6 avoiding sins in order to listen, to find inner recollection, and perhaps to facilitate words that can be life-giving. We would add: in order to strengthen unity in the community.

A CHRISTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION?

Does a silent Christ stand in the center of this chapter? It seems to me that as a second possibility we can look at texts such as Isaiah 53:7 and the description of Christ's passion. They show silence before the accusers that, however, in my opinion, ought not to be applied to the everyday monastic silence. Thus it seems most apt to view silence as a virtue of wisdom, for it is interesting to note that RB 5 quotes mainly texts from the New Testament, and this abruptly changes in RB 6, which quotes mainly texts from wisdom literature. The same observation can be made about RB 7. In the second and third steps of humility our rules have texts from the New Testament, yet steps nine to eleven (dealing with silence, laughing, speaking) use texts from the

50. 4.50; 7.44-48; 46.5-6.

wisdom books. With regard to the silence of Christ, we can certainly point to the last part of RB 6, "not to open one's mouth"; "and he opened not his mouth" in Isaiah 53:7.

To me it is, however, important to see that keeping silence connects us also with non-Christian monasticism and asceticism, and here we as Christian monastics may go a step further and point to Christ. When being accused and experiencing injustice this connection is certainly important.

CONCLUSION

Let us briefly look at the entire Rule of Benedict and its relationship to silence: Beyond RB 6 we do not find any absolute silence but rather a human discipline. (In contrast to this the person of Benedict putting his finger to his mouth has greatly influenced the monks in the area of fine arts; apparently they needed this image in their time.)

Silence is kept during the night, which is the time to pray, to be awake, and also to sleep (42.1). During table reading there is "complete silence" (*summum silentium*; 38.5) so that the reading can be heard (38.5). The same is true for the time of *lectio divina*: the others are not to be disturbed (48.5, 17-19). There is also to be complete silence after the Divine Office so that the one who may want to pray silently is not hindered (52.3, 5). Silence surrounds anyone who is excommunicated so that he can truly reflect (RB 26), and it is necessary with regard to the weaknesses of brothers who would not be able to cope with all that monks saw when being on journeys (67.5) and when encountering guests who perhaps like to talk much while others precisely seek silence (53.23-24).

In conclusion: There is silence to hear the reading, to immerse oneself in Sacred Scripture, for praying, for healing, for recollection, and also for sleeping.

Yet the second and third parts of the Rule (RB 8–73) lead us to the conclusion that speaking was allowed not infrequently. Monks encouraged each other already before the Vigil (22.8); the *senpectae* console the brothers who made mistakes (27.2-3); the cellarer declines a request reasonably and with humility (31.7) or offers a good word (31.13-14) that is better than the best gift. There is talking in the counsel of the brothers (RB 3; 65). During Lent monks deny themselves some talking (49.7); the porter readily answers with all gentleness, in the fear of God and the zeal of love (66.4).

Thus we can see the different goals both in keeping silence and in speaking:

- Important is interior unity; we are to find peace and inner quiet.
- It is clear that silence nurtures a person's inner unity. In silence, we can recollect ourselves, to be at one with ourselves. We are able to see

more deeply as if looking into quiet, untroubled waters. Silence helps in controlling the passions, to be in control of ourselves. It has a healing power.

- Prayer will benefit from silence. Only in silence and recollection can we truly listen to Sacred Scripture, to the word of God, and to God's will; only in silence can we sense the attraction to pray. Silence is also necessary so that others can pray and to foster an atmosphere of silence in the community in which it is easier for all to pray (as long as it is a loving silence).
- In prayer there are fewer and fewer words until prayer itself is silent presence before our great God. There is also the silence that expresses respect before the mystery. Words are too weak to share something of this mystery.
- Silence helps us to listen to one another and to empathize with others. Precisely for dialogue it is very important to listen to the words or the unexpressed concerns of the others. In this way it is easier to have compassion, to feel with the others. Then we will not simply prescribe remedies or sound advice, and will even less want to judge or dominate. Nouwen thinks that on the superficial level we often work out fear or irritation in order to satisfy our own needs.[51] We also grow together in silence, not only when we communicate with each other. Bonhoeffer says: The word that creates a new community and unifies it is only a word that emerges out of silence.[52]
- In the apostolate silence is also important. It is great gift to guests who through silence can come to themselves.

It goes without saying that both in speaking and in silence Christ has an important part, just as he does in the entire monastic life. Yet in the chapter on silence in RB Christ is not specifically emphasized.

51. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 22–24, and *Clowning in Rome* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1979), 23f.

52. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 77ff.

Chapter 7

About Humility

TODAY'S CONTEXT

Probably even the chapter's heading raises problems for us. Perhaps we simply turn off our attention when we hear the word "humility." It might be interesting to write down all the spontaneous associations this word evokes in us.

As a beginning I would like to present the thoughts of some authors that I find representative in their thinking about RB 7. First Antoine Vergote, a psychologist who was asked to comment on this chapter as an outsider, then André Louf and Anselm Grün, who speak about it as insiders.[1]

Vergote took great pains to penetrate Benedictine spirituality and to comprehend it. His criticism of RB 7 can be summarized in the following points:

- Humility appears as awareness of sin and of personal unworthiness; in addition, fear of divine punishment is used, or at least there is too much emphasis on fearing God (406f.). Certainly Augustine influenced Christian pessimism (418), and liberation was seen unilaterally as liberation from sin (421). RB may strengthen the tendency to psychological self-accusation (424f.) and may cultivate weakness (426f.). Klemp particularly emphasizes the Rule using the threat of hell, which, in turn, may generate anxiety.[2]
- RB is voluntaristic (416) in teaching the detachment from self-will that, however, is a source of personal initiative. Humility demands hard and

1. Vergote, "A Psychological Approach to Humility in the Rule of St. Benedict"; Louf, "Humility and Obedience in Monastic Initiation"; similarly, Grün, *Spiritualität von unten*.

2. Klemp, "*Regula S. Benedicti*."

systematic work (409f.), yet a person who strives for humility will miss it. This is what Kierkegaard called the Catholic type of hypocrisy (423). This leads to a lack of spontaneity and to difficulties in human relationships; we pursue an ideal that we personally fabricated for ourselves (423f.).

- This might encourage people to focus too much on their own ego, to make great efforts to become humble before God in order to ensure salvation (421f.). This chapter also seems rather individualistic, promoting anyone to humble themselves systematically, trying to see themselves as worthless servants, seeing themselves as insignificant and worthless (422). This ideal of humility is, or very easily becomes, narcissistic (424).
- At that point there exists the danger of falling into infantilism; I must lose myself and empty myself of everything. Then I will not take responsibility for myself or others. This is especially true when the candidates who enter religious orders have not yet developed a sound identity, have not yet truly learned to accept themselves (425). When people enter too early into this ascetical tendency of renunciation before having developed their own will and a sense for their own responsibility, a crisis in personal maturity may easily follow (425f.). In addition, a striving for dominance (necessary in itself) does not seem to have any space.
- In RB there is lack of attention to the reality of creation (420f.) yet the first step of humility should be to accept oneself as a creature that is beloved by God (424f.).
- Finally Vergote proposes to replace the word "humility" with "authenticity," which means to be true to ourselves (427); as we are awed by the grandeur of God, we forget ourselves (428).

Vergote's article met with quite a bit of criticism, but, in my opinion, it led to a healthy discussion. Besides Latteur, I want to mention Guevin, who later addressed the concept of authenticity, stating that Benedict indeed had a sense of celebrating, as evident in the rituals, and was less individualistic than theocentric.[3]

On the other side, an insider also points to the danger of this chapter. Louf refers to Isaac of Ninive who distinguishes between a humility that is pursued to the utmost and a humility that is bestowed by the Holy Spirit as the crowning of monastic life. Several elements in Louf's thoughts coincide with the distinction made by Anselm Grün between a "spirituality from above" and one "from below."[4]

3. Guevin, "Authenticity"; Latteur, "12 Degrees of Humility."
4. Grün, *Spiritualität von unten*.

According to Grün a "spirituality from above" presents us with ideals. Looking at the saints and to great virtues young people are enticed to go out of themselves. We cannot do without this spirituality from above, which has a positive function by stirring up life in us and is most often found at the beginning of our spiritual journey. In general, people imagine perfection as a continual process of growing or as a more or less difficult ascent, as the result of human endeavor. Besides all its good results, it contains also dangers. Virtue may mislead us into wanting to reach God by our own strength. Yet those who try to come to God by walking the way of virtue beat their head against a wall. They do not find the door that leads to God. This door is humility, the acknowledgment of their own inability to become pious and holy. Those who identify with high ideals will without fail be confronted with their shadow sides; they will be forced to face their humanity, their earthiness, their earth" (Latin *humus*). Anthony said: "When you see that a young monk strives toward heaven with his own will, hold fast his feet, pull him down, for it is of no use to him."[5] This presents the danger of a spiritual shortcut, a "spiritual by-passing" in the attempt to deny basic human needs, feelings, and developmental tasks, or to transcend them prematurely.[6]

Louf talks about a projection of the ideal, actually of the super-ego, onto a conviction.[7] Especially when initiating candidates into monastic life, we often witness a strong idealization of monastic life. Their call is closely interwoven with a certain striving for perfection. Young people are enthusiastic about the ideal for which they are willing to make great sacrifices and to which they are fully committed. They want to become consummate, holy monastics. Benedict talks about the "fervor of the novice" (*fervor novicius*; 1.3) that, however, may cover up an unconscious yearning for love, security, and emotional shelter. We can live out this fervor in a self-focused manner. In monastic literature they find some support when reading about climbing up to the mountain, about the summit that monks strive to reach, about a ladder with steps. Benedict even dares to coin the expression "the highest summit of humility" (7.5; *summae humilitatis culmen*). Those accompanying the candidates may yet strengthen this ideal and the demands of the super-ego. Louf says: "An eager (!) practice of humility is in every respect very comforting and satisfying for both sides" (267). Yet only for a short time! For the ideal of humility has only a weak connection with their concrete needs and the reality of their human nature. Thus, people may be extremely courageous and magnanimous, yet nothing flourishes in them, and nothing shines forth

5. *VitPat* V.10.11.
6. Grün, 29–30.
7. Louf, "Humility," 262.

from them. In reality the high-pitched rigid ideal is but a protection against real weakness. Louf (268f.) quotes Kierkegaard's dictum that the greatest heresy of Christianity was the belief that the opposite of sin was virtue. On the contrary, the opposite of sin is grace.

A further danger of RB 7 is found in the area of guilt feelings, often associated with feelings of self-punishment, self-hatred, perhaps even of self-destruction. The ideal of humility does provide an opportunity to counteract these unconscious feelings. Yet it is always a self-focused humility that never opens out to God. Or we can call it, with Fénelon, an "arrogant humility." Today this piety evokes aggressive rebellion. And with it other obligations are easily thrown off. Apparently we have experienced our neurotic humility as very damaging and paralyzing.[8]

Authentic humility, however, is relevant even today. A "spirituality from below" proceeds on the opposite path. Time and again Louf points out that it is important to descend into the depths of human nature where humility becomes real. "The true soil of humility lies . . . in the deepest depths where a person is truly weak, but not in the person's ideal."[9] At some point a breakthrough must occur that leads into our deepest weakness, and only then spiritual growth can begin.[10] To live out of weakness means to live out of grace, for grace is linked to weakness and brokenness. When I err against norms that are yet too high for me, I will not say, "This was not a sin," but rather, "I have more to learn." With regard to certain innovations I will not say, "The old way was nonsense," but rather, "Today we can no longer do it this way"—and this was also Benedict's attitude.

In his mercy God will forge a link to the confession of our weakness.[11] In our depths, our very powerlessness changes into a strength of the spirit. At times God has to crush our heart (cf. "the contrite heart," *cor contritum*). "The decisive spiritual test will bring a monk to the brink of despair. . . . Once the walls of false humility and false perfection are demolished, suddenly everything is possible anew."[12] In this connection Louf talks about an ascesis of weakness, which he affirms. "The ascesis of weakness means to practice ourselves in accepting grace. And because grace always begins only in our weakness, ascesis is, and must be, a practice in accepting our weakness, learning to fathom the mystery of weakness and grace."[13]

8. Louf, "Humility," 270.
9. Ibid., 267.
10. Ibid., 268.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 271.
13. Ibid., 279.

For Grün RB does not describe a monk's path to virtue but rather the inner spiritual path of human maturing and the way of contemplation. This path leads through a descent. Therefore the chapter on humility is a description of a growing experience of God and of an ever more lucid self-knowledge. In this chapter Benedict traces the path on which monks come closer to God and are more and more transformed by God's loving and healing closeness. For Benedict humility is not a virtue that can be earned but rather an experience into which the monastic grows. In humility Benedict sees a path of practice that leads to perfect love, to unity with God.

For his "spirituality from below" Grün uses biblical models, e.g., the treasure in the field, the precious pearl, the weeds in the wheat, the baptism of Jesus. While standing in the midst of human guilt, the heavens open and God says to Jesus: "You are my beloved son on whom my favor rests." This will happen to us in the same way. Only when we are ready like Jesus to descend into the waters of the Jordan, to stand in our own fragility and guilt, only then can the heavens open over us and God can say to us the word of our unconditional right to exist. Since Origen, the descent into the abyss has been an image for Christ's descent into the shadowy world of our soul.

In summary we can say that RB does not describe the ascent to virtue but a growing experience of grace, God paves a way for himself into our reality, and for this he needs our receptivity and our peaceful tranquility to let God work in us.[14]

Although I can identify best with the preceding interpretations, I will briefly present some others.

In his book *Truthful Living* Michael Casey approaches RB 7 from the human angle.[15] The root of the Latin word *humilitas* is *humus*—earth, soil—and thus our life is to be connected to the earth. Humility means total acceptance of our own life (9). All too often humility has been used together with a prohibition to stand up for human rights, and under the influence of Jansenism there was too much emphasis on avoiding sins (11f.). It is not easy to let Benedict's text stand in its harshness with its dangerous tendency to passivity and a neglect to preach the Good News. Casey also warns that humility ought not be set up as an ideal for people who, by nature, are already fearful and that it is not a virtue that is reserved for older people (14–17). We

14. Olivier du Roy, *Moines d'aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1972): "Humility . . . is . . . an emptiness, a poverty, a spiritual vacuum that strips us and makes us available. Therefore this path of the steps of humility is rather to be seen as a path that God invites us to walk on, it is like God's teaching through which, little by little, he strips us and carves out our potential" (314).

15. Casey, *Truthful Living*; page references in parenthesis refer to the edition of 1998.

should not preach humility to those who already have low self-esteem (18), or we might use RB 7 in order to put down the "prophets" of our time and instead to propound a culture of submission (21f.). Furthermore, humility is not obtained by imposing humiliations as was often believed some time ago (22f.). Casey describes humility as honesty and truth, and thus we have to confess that we are dealing with sin and self-will and with the fact that we are making ourselves the center of our world. On our own we are unable to achieve salvation; it is a gift of divine grace. Eventually our created nature will be elevated by being conformed to Christ (29–41).

A feminist approach (Chittister[16]) emphasizes that RB 7 was written for men in a patriarchal society and that the chapter could be damaging for women by further diminishing their sense of self. Preaching humility might become a tool for suppressing women. Benedict, however, would rather emphasize feminist values.

Almost all interpreters explain RB 7 as an invitation to follow Christ and show how Christ is transparent in each step. Seen from the vantage point of humility, the majority of the commentaries show the imitation of Christ primarily as an imitation of his suffering. The commentaries until after the Second Vatican Council in general had no difficulties with a literal interpretation of the chapter.[17] As far as I know Kardong was the first to critique RB 7 from the vantage point of our era.[18]

CONTEXT IN BENEDICT'S TIME

1. Certainly Benedict did not have the problems we have today. In reading the Rule, we get the impression that he had to deal with relatively strong characters who often were rather too self-confident.[19]

Until the early twentieth century the motif of hell was widely used in order to lead people to a reasonably good life. The old-fashioned parish missions always contained a fiery sermon about hell. The thirty-day retreats of St. Ignatius also have a special meditation about life in hell. This may give us a sense of the extent to which our situation has changed, but then we may also more easily admit that a Rule of the sixth century—and this is true for RB 7—speaks about the torments of hell. In this context we need to remember that depictions of hell began to flourish only in the fifth to sixth centuries,

16. Chittister, "Pride and Humility."

17. Hollermann, "Humility."

18. Kardong, 167f., see also his article, "Clarifications."

19. Cf., e.g., the frequent use of the word "presume" (*praesumere*); also Miquel, "*Praesumere*."

especially in the Apocrypha, while until then the reality of the resurrection was central.[20]

2. We need to consider that Benedict had to deal not just with apparently robust characters but also with others who desired to turn from sin, often grave sin, to a good life. And let us remember that entering a monastery then could replace the public penance that was administered for grave sins. Yet the entire Rule shows that grave sinners did not turn easily into saints.

3. By looking back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry we realize that renunciations made all too early were problematic. The apostles whom Jesus asked to leave everything were proven men who had acquired possessions, had a family, and presumably had enjoyed the good things of life. Renouncing that which we do not have does not seem to correspond to the gospel. The persons whom Jesus called to conversion and to become like children were actually adults; he didn't ask this of children. One ought not to preach humility at once to persons who have not experienced love in any way, who do not have a reasonably healthy self-confidence; nor should total renunciation be preached to those who are poor. It will be very difficult to live out authentically a renunciation that was undertaken prematurely, for the need to recover what was missed arises very easily later. This does not mean, however, that renouncing everything is altogether impossible, as is evident in the lives of many saints, yet this is not the normal course of life. We certainly cannot schematically say that the first stage of maturity, of strengthening the ego, must be concluded before the path of humility can even begin; rather, this is a complex interaction.[21]

4. In antiquity the Latin word *humilitas* was used to designate the lowest class of the population, that is, those who were at the bottom. The word acquired a more positive meaning only through the language used in the Bible and by Christianity. Mary's *Magnificat* sings of God who looked with favor on the humility of his handmaid (*respexit humilitatem ancillae suae*; Luke 1:48). Since RB commentaries usually display the biblical foundation of the Rule with many and wide-ranging quotes, I will mention here only two frequently quoted verses that present Christian life as an imitation of Christ's humility. He calls out to his disciples: "learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart" (old translation: *mitis sum et humilis corde*; Matt 11:29), a text that was very important for Benedict as well as for his sources. Further, humility is an imitation of Christ who humbled himself and became obedient (Phil 2:8, 2:3; *humiliavit semetispum factus obediens*). This verse, too, is quoted by Benedict and his source in their chapter on humility.

20. See art. "Hölle," *TRE*, and *LThK*.

21. Cf. Kardong, "Clarifications," 23–25; Wu, "Humility," 199f., 197, 205–7.

For patristic sources we could say that humility is generally submission to God and the neighbor; it is readiness to serve.[22] "This is not as important as is humility in the catalogues of virtues, but rather as recognition and acknowledgment of one's own low, i.e., sinful and thus unlawful, condition before God and others."[23] In cenobitic literature humility is primarily seen as obedience, as willingness to serve in submission to the superior.[24]

SOURCES FOR RB 7

Here I will only give a brief description of the two direct sources: Cassian and RM.

1. For Cassian (*Inst.* IV.39.1-3), the fear of God is important for the path of purification and practice of virtues. In addition, he speaks of progressing from a fear of sin to a childlike fear. His description of humility is the direct source for RB 7 and RM 10. Cassian does not give steps but rather signs by which humility is recognized, namely, ten indications referring to the relationship to oneself and to the other. The relationship to God may be contained in them but is not explicitly mentioned. Love is mentioned only seldom by Cassian. Vogüé is probably correct when he says that the Fathers speak more of humility than of love. Perhaps they have a concept of love that is too high, similar to that which we have today of mystical life. They spoke of these heights only seldom and in muted ways. The fear of God and humility, used as synonyms, accompany us through our entire life. And community life above all is fully immersed in this fear of God,[25] which accompanies human persons through their entire growth, even to its heights, yet is transformed into a loving fear, while the fear of sin and punishment is driven out by love.

In a short schema the signs of humility in *Inst* IV.39 are placed opposite the steps in RB and RM:

***Inst*. IV.39: Beginning of Salvation Is Fear of God**	**First Step: Fear of God**
IV.39.2 Indication	+1 fear of God, avoidance of sins

22. The German word *Demut* derives from an older word, *dien-muot*, which means having a basic attitude of serving (*dienen*).

23. See art. "Demut," *RAC*, 757.

24. Ibid., 767; cf. Pachomius, *PreacLeg* 3; Jerome, *Ep.* 22.35. For the Christian Scriptures and patristic sources see Puzicha, 145–49; Kardong, 160f.

25. Vogüé *VII*, 182; i.e., *Spiritual and Doctrinal Commentary*, 121.

1. Putting to death all desires (*omnes voluntates*)	2. Not to love one's own will (*propriam voluntatem*)
2. Not concealing anything from an elder (*seniori*)	5. Not concealing anything from the abbot
3. Commit everything to an elder's judgment (*discretioni . . . iudicio*)	3. Obedience to the superior
4. Gentle obedience, steadfast patience	4. Perseverance in injustice
5. Bear injustice	
6. To follow the common rule and the example of elders	8. To follow the common rule and the example of elders
7. Considering oneself as lowest	6. To be satisfied with the lowest
8. To believe this in the deepest heart	7. To see oneself as the lowest and be convinced of it
9. To restrain one's tongue	9. To restrain one's tongue
10. Not to laugh readily or quickly	10. Not to laugh readily and quickly
	+11 speak humbly
	+12 "I . . . a sinner"
IV.39.3	Cf. epilogue of RM and RB
Love without fear, observe everything without effort as if naturally	

In *Inst.* IV.43 Cassian provides another summary: "The beginning of our salvation . . . is the fear of the Lord. . . . From humility is generated the dying of desire. . . . Once the vices have been expelled the virtues bear fruit and grow. When virtue abounds purity of heart is acquired. With purity of heart the perfection of apostolic love is possessed."

2. The Rule of the Master was inspired by Cassian and roughly follows Cassian's indications but transforms them into the steps of a ladder that the disciple ascends and that are in a different order. He adds the first and the twelfth steps, which are inspired by Basil; these two steps correspond to each

other in their completeness. The first, fear of the Lord, comprises thoughts, words, works, walking, the will, and desires. The last one is also complete: wherever the monk is and including all his faculties, he recites the word of the publican. In addition, in almost every step RM adds the relationship to God, thus making humility basically a virtue before God, which then has consequences for all other relationships in life. At the end (10.92-122) the Master minutely describes the joys of heaven where the ladder ends. The joys of heaven, too, comprise the entire human person: seeing, listening, smell, taste, and touch. Here the Master is inspired by the apocryphal *Passion of Sebastian* 13.

3. By and large Benedict copied this chapter from RM. This may be disappointing to us, yet even so it is no less important. This fact indicates that Benedict saw this chapter as so important that he adopted it for the most part (or had it copied), omitting some passages, adding others, and changing a number of things, as we will see in our detailed exegesis. Some important aspects, however, are to be mentioned here at the beginning. Benedict omits the eschatological outlook of RM, and thus his ladder does not end in heaven—as promised in RM—but rather on earth and in love. This is quite unheard of compared with the tradition (see the comments on the symbolism of the ladder below). Furthermore, he avoids saying that the disciple ascends the steps, thus weakening the ascending schema. In fact, the steps are not steps in an organic development nor does the chapter describe a straightforward development from fear of the Lord to love, as he inserts the motive of love already into the third step. We might concisely characterize Benedict's changes with a few words: less logical, less bound to the image of the ascent, more focused on earthly reality.

4. If we further trace the use of the word "humility" in the Rule and in the texts inserted by Benedict in its first part, it becomes evident that he often uses expressions such as "with all humility," "in humility," or similar ones. This expression is not from RM, and thus it is interesting to see in which contexts he wants something done with humility. There is first the prayer of the heart in which we pray to God "with all humility and purity of devotion" (20.2, cf. also 47.4). Then he mentions the relationship of the monks to their superior: they are to petition something "with all humility" (6.7); with "reason and humility" the community is to request a prior (65.14); and any given task is to be carried out "with all humility" (57.1).

Humility also affects the fraternal relationships, which is most obvious in the chapter on the cellarer. Above all, he is to be humble (31.13) and deny an unreasonable request "with reason and humility" (31.7). Guests are to be shown "all humility" (53.6), and even someone from outside may criticize something in the monastery "reasonably and with the humility of love" (61.4).

When surveying all these texts, we see already not only that humility refers to the spiritual path of the individual monk but that the entire community is to be formed by this humility in all their relationships, and this certainly presupposes that each individual has courageously set out on the path shown in RB 7. Humility is to lead to positive human relationships. It may also be interesting to note that nowhere do we find the expression *ad humilitatem* in which humility is indicated as the goal. Apparently humility is not seen as a virtue that can be reached by great efforts.[26]

With this chapter Benedict, however, ceases to follow RM right down to details, moving ever more away from it the longer he works on his Rule until, in RB 72, he has found a voice that is entirely his own. Thus RB 7 must also be seen in a different connection. Certainly it is the concluding chapter, and perhaps the high point, of the Rule's first part. But Benedict equally writes a conclusion for its last part: RB 72 that deals with the good zeal that monks are to have, a chapter that has moved furthest away from RM. We might say that it provides the Rule with its own depth, the light, in which we are now to read the entire Rule, a biblical chapter full of fervent zeal that concerns the brothers, the abbot, God, and, above all, Christ, a chapter that contains, as it were, the sum of Benedict's experiences.

5. The problem of "hermeneutics" is to be considered briefly. Which points did Benedict emphasize and which points are we to emphasize today: community, love, or the humility of the individual? Benedict's originality seems to lie precisely in that he took over the fundamental parts of RM but then built his own "cenobitic house" by accentuating the horizontal relationships. It is clear that the two points of the ellipsis—to use an image—cannot easily be brought into harmony, but perhaps even this is intentional. In any case, in our interpretation of RB 7 we will not go astray if, in each case, we extend the horizontal lines in the sense of RB 72.[27]

6. Finally I would like to bring up the etymology of the Latin word *humilitas*. The root of the word is *humus*, earth; from here we could also call humility a connection with the earth or describe it as being "grounded," "down to earth." The word *humanitas*—humanity in the sense of human kindness—also derives from the same root. It is interesting to note that in the chapter about receiving guests two parallel verses say that they are to be shown all "humility" (*humilitas*; 53.6) and a bit later with the same

26. Only RB 7.5 (following RM) might indicate such a directional goal: if we want to reach the summit of humility, we must set up the ladder.

27. In this context it might be interesting to find out how many pages the different commentaries devote to chapters 7 and 72 seen as a percentage of the entirety of each commentary.

words "they are to be shown all human kindness" (*humanitas*; 53.9). Being grounded, anchored in the earth as foundation for human kindness! Then we also have the word *humor* deriving from the same root. It is evident that a truly humble person does not have to fear for his or her position or effectiveness; rather, such persons are free and honest and have accepted themselves with all their limits and gifts, just as they are, and therefore can also laugh at themselves.

This corresponds to the thinking of Anselm Grün. A spirituality from below will have an easier time accepting individual weaknesses, illnesses, hurts, even powerlessness and failings—just as life presents them—and through them all humble individuals are able to open their hands to receive God's mercy. In a community such a monastic will prefer to turn to the marginal members, the ill, the weak, even the grumblers. In the end the result of humility is humor that is based and built on closeness to the earth. Humility is calm and relaxed and deals with reality as it is, in a humorous manner.[28]

TITLE: ON HUMILITY (*DE HUMILITATE*).

This is a very sober title, for the Rule of the Master presents us with the following title: "The nature of the brothers' humility, how it is acquired and how once acquired it is maintained." This title, in my opinion, already may point the perception of humility in a wrong direction since the emphasis could lie in acquiring it. As a title for the chapter we could also think of the following saying of the Fathers: "Above all, the monk must have humility for this is the first commandment of our Savior when he said, 'Blessed are those who are poor in spirit.'"[29]

Vv. 1-9

This first part begins with the call of God through Sacred Scripture (seen as a subject) and in verse 9 returns to the subject in the *evocatio divina*, the call from God. The entire person stands in the center: heart, eyes, walking. Actions, body and soul—life in this world.

V. 1: Brothers, divine Scripture calls out to us saying: (*Clamat nobis Scriptura divina, fratres, dicens:*)

The chapter begins with: Divine Scripture cries out, calls out to us, brothers. At the outset there is a call, even a crying out of God himself before morality and human acting are even mentioned. This cry, this call, sounds

28. Grün, *Spiritualität*, referring to Jean Vanier.
29. *VitPat* V.15.23.

through the entire chapter as well as the entire Rule. In Latin this first verse has a circular form:

Clamat (there is a call)
  nobis (to us)
    Scriptura divina (divine Scripture)
  fratres (brothers)
dicens (saying)

A loud call strikes our ears, reaches "us . . . brothers," and it is significant that Benedict includes himself with his brothers, though he could also speak as their master or abbot. Benedict too allows himself to be called personally. Divine Scripture stands in the center and is seen from its divine side; it is the word of God. In Benedict's community Scripture acts like a divine person.[30] Benedict carries out what he says in Prol.21: "Let us go forward on his ways under the guidance of the Gospel." It is Christ himself whom we are following when we cling to the voice of Scripture. Here Christ speaks with the words of the gospel, yet he can also speak with the words of a psalm or is addressed with words of a psalm (cf. below and the Prologue). Christ absorbed the tradition of wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures and her ways of loudly calling out to people inviting them to follow her.[31]

The first paragraph (vv. 1-4) with its two biblical texts is taken in its substance from RM. With regard to Sacred Scripture, Luke 14:11 is important, as is the end of the pericope about the Pharisee and the publican as well as Matthew 23:12. With each quote two pairs are mentioned: who exalts himself (*exaltare*), will be humbled (future passive: *humiliabitur*), who humbles himself (*humiliate, humiliaverit*), will be exalted (*exaltabitur*).

Vv. 1-2: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Thus, when Scripture says this it shows us that each self-exaltation is a kind of pride. (*"Omnis qui se exaltat humiliabitur et qui se humiliat exaltabitur." Cum haec ergo dicit, ostendit nobis omnem exaltationem genus esse superbiae*.)

To exalt oneself (*se exaltat*) is very active, yet it is paired with its opposite, the passive and futuristic "he will be humbled" (*humiliabitur*), and vice versa, "humbles himself" (*se humiliat*) is paired with the passive and futuristic "will be exalted" (*exaltabitur*). The passive forms show God's action as it is customary in biblical language. In Scripture this saying is found at the end of the lesson about the Pharisee and the publican; the Pharisee exalts himself

30. Cf. Prol.9, quoting Ps 94/95:8, and also Prol.14-15.
31. John 7:37; Matt 11:28; Prov 8–9.

by listing his good deeds and despises the publican; the publican looks to the ground (*humus*) and accepts his true humble position. This lesson appears again in the twelfth degree of humility. Luke 14 deals with the question of who should occupy the highest places at a banquet. Some want to be the first, and they will be shamed; others who do not shy away from being the last, will be honored. The following word from Scripture can serve as a complement: "The first will be the last, and the last will be the first."[32] Of course, we may already consider that Christ made himself a servant and chose to be in the last place: "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27).

This biblical category has its root in the Hebrew Scriptures (cf. the Psalms). Mary's *Magnificat* sings about the same law, in part even using the same and similar words: "He has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness . . . the Mighty One has done great things for me; . . . he dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart . . . but lifted up the lowly" (Lk 1:48-52). In verse 1 the simple sentence from Scripture points right at the outset to the two aspects: whoever exalts himself . . . (this is followed by a meditation about pride and its punishment, vv. 2-4); whoever humbles himself . . . (followed in reverse by a meditation with the admonition to ascend to heaven through humility, vv. 5-9).

Vv. 3-4: The prophet is careful not to do this when he says: "Lord, my heart is not proud and my eyes are not haughty. I do not busy myself with great matters, with things too sublime for me." But what "if I am not humble and exalt myself?—Like a weaned child on its mother's lap you will repay my soul" (Ps 130/131:1-2). (*Quod se cavere propheta indicat dicens: "Domine, non est exaltatum cor meum neque elati sunt oculi mei, neque ambulavi in magnis neque mirabilibus super me." Sed quid "si non humiliter sentiebam, si exaltavi animam meam?—sicut ablactatum super matrem suam, ita retribues in animam meam."*)

In the Vulgate Psalm 130 contrasts the humility of the child with human thinking about things that are all too high and then threatens with consequences if someone is not humble. Contrary to the original meaning the weaned child is, as it were, being punished, that is, separated from its mother. John Chrysostom interprets in the same way: "Weaned, that is, separated from him [God], I have only great sorrow, everything is lost."[33] The Hebrew text says that the weaned child has no more demands of its mother but simply rests quietly with her. This is an image that has been used time and again to describe contemplation in the sense of a prayer of simplicity.

32. Luke 14:11; Matt 23:12; further, Matt 19:30; 20:16; Mark 9:34, etc.

33. John Chrysostom, *In Ps* 130.2; cf. Augustine, *In Ps.* 130:2; for an overview see Nesmy, *I Padri*, 697.

The psalmist speaks about the two sides of the human being: heart and eyes—the double aspect: internal and external, which later is called "body and "soul" (7.9).

My eyes are not haughty. Raised eyes indicate arrogance. Eyes characterize the entire attitude of a person for then the heart too is exalted, rises above what is appropriate to something that seems wonderful and is not in our reach.

Verses 5-9 offer the application; now the entire image is more active.

Vv. 5-6: Brothers, if we want to reach the highest summit of humility and to arrive quickly to that exaltation in the heavens, to which we ascend in our present life by humility, then we are to set up through ascending deeds that ladder that appeared to Jacob in his dream. (*Unde, fratres, si summae humilitatis volumus culmen attingere et ad exaltationem illam caelestem ad quam per praesentis vitae humilitatem ascenditur volumus velociter pervenire, actibus nostris ascendentibus scala illa erigenda est quae in somnio Iacob apparuit,*)

"We want to reach the summit; we climb through ascending deeds; a ladder is to be erected." This corresponds to the new beginning a person is undertaking. Verse 5 has some similarity with some verses in the Prologue: "If you desire true life, restrain your tongue and do good" (Prol.17); "if we wish to dwell in his [God's] kingdom, we will not arrive there unless we run there by doing good works" (Prol.22); and even more emphatically, "If we want to reach eternal life, while there is still time, we must run and act" (Prol.42-44). At the very outset Benedict challenges all the energies of a young person who desires to begin monastic life. This means to strive for eternal life with zeal, energy, and decisiveness. The goal in the Prologue is eternal life; in RB 7 the immediate goal seems to be the "highest summit of humility"[34] while right afterward the "heavenly exaltation" is mentioned. This, in my opinion, is the eschatological goal since here at the beginning of the chapter—in contrast to its conclusion—the ladder is erected toward heaven.

If we look closely, however, the sentence doesn't quite go together: we want to reach the summit of humility and ascend through the humility of our present life. First, humility seems to be something like a goal, but then it is the means to reach the goal. A similar tension can be seen in RB 73 with which RB 7 has many similarities. We might think that, at the end of the Rule, we should be able to sit down leisurely on the summit of humility, but

34. Cassian uses a similar expression in *Conf*. XVIII.15.8: "If, therefore, we wish to attain to the height of his virtues, such must be the first foundations that we lay." See also Kardong, "The Heights of Humility."

we seem to be further away from the goal precisely after having tried, with the Lord's help, to practice this "Rule for beginners" since now other, and more distant, summits of perfection and virtue appear (RB 73.2). In 73.8-9 we sense again the same energy as in 7.5. With energy we desire to begin the ascent; we are driven by the zeal to continue striving until we truly reach the heights, our heavenly home. Apparently we are required to reach something that we can never fully possess: the more progress we make, the further away is the goal. Yet this is not said until the very end of the Rule, and in order to grasp this truth, we need to experience God, to experience monastic life.

We want to reach the summit of humility . . . we want to arrive quickly. This in itself is a contrast. We would see humility together with depth, less with the summit. This is the paradox of the entire chapter, that is, that we ascend through humility, descend through exaltation (cf. also v. 7), and "ascending deeds" apparently are deeds of humility; shall we say "deeds of service"?

In what follows, some of Benedict's changes in the text of RM indicate that Benedict is more concrete and more interested in progress and the humility in the present life than in the joys of heaven, which he presumes and believes to be certain. Already in verse 6 he omits RM's expression that the ladder "is raised to heaven." Later, in verse 9, he again does not say that the ladder goes to heaven, and finally he also omits the Master's long description of heaven (RM 10.92-122).

Vv. 6b-8: On [the ladder] he saw angels ascending and descending. Without doubt we have to understand their descending and ascending in the sense that we descend by self-exaltation and ascend by humility. The erected ladder is our earthly life that through a humbled heart is being erected by God toward heaven. (*per quam, ei "descendentes et ascendentes angeli" monstrabantur. Non aliud sine dubio descensus ille et ascensus a nobis intelligitur nisi exaltation descendere et humilitate ascendere. Scala vera ipsa erecta nostra est vita in saeculo, quae humiliato corde a Domino erigatur ad caelum.*)

What is at stake here is the spiritual progress, which, however, proceeds in a paradoxical manner. In the parallel verse in RM the ladder's end is raised to heaven after heart and head were humbled by God, while Benedict says only that the ladder is oriented by God toward heaven; thus he emphasizes God's action more strongly. Activity is transformed into receptivity. It is not we ourselves who erect the ladder to heaven, as verse 6 suggested; rather, it is God who does it. In addition Benedict is no longer concerned with the inner path, and thus he here omits the "humiliated head" of RM and speaks only of the humble heart. When the heart is humble in its very depths, this will be translated into concrete effects though it will not be necessarily visible

in external behavior. Benedict mentions the monk's bowed head only in the twelfth degree of humility (7.63). Humility cannot be forced by performing external acts but rather arises from inside and only then has externally visible effects.

V. 9: We may call the sides of the ladder our body and our soul into which God's call inserted various rungs of humility and discipline by which we are to ascend. (*Latera enim eius scalae dicimus nostrum esse corpus et animam, in qua latera diversos gradus humilitatis vel disciplinae evocatio divina ascendendo inseruit*.)

Both RM and RB emphasize that body and soul are the two sides of the ladder. Their intent is to show a totality, the inside and the outside, from which we cannot deduce a duality. The inside refers mainly to steps 1–7, the outside more to steps 8–11. First, something must be purified inside, be changed, then it will also be visible outside. It is interesting to contrast the designations for the two sides at the beginning of RB 7 and in the twelfth step.

Heart, eyes (*cor, oculi*)	
Soul (*anima*)	Body (*corpus*)
Humility (*humilitas*)	Discipline (*disciplina*)
Heart (*cor*)	Body (*corpus*)
Heart (*cor*)	Head, eyes (*caput*, *aspectus*, *oculi*)

Already here it seems at least doubtful whether RB is intended to show one step after the other as steps in a straightforward development. Any spiritual development occurs in an up-and-down motion, seemingly going back, being thrown back, being raised again—more in the sense of a spiral (cf. author's comments on the Prologue). God will surely have a plan for each person.

For both rules it is important that God's call (*evocatio divina*) inserts the steps into the ladder. Thus we can say that God's call determines each time which stage is relevant for us; for each individual life there are different steps of different kinds and of different heights. With this Benedict turns back to God's calling in verse 1.

This ladder on which someone ascends is modified at the end of the Rule (RB 72) by a communal walking. We are on the way as a community. Yet it is not a competitive race where everyone wants to advance faster than the others (as in a school); rather, we all desire to arrive together. Thus, at the end of the Rule, Benedict says that Christ may lead us all together (72.12). This is

a similar and yet fundamentally different image. Whoever has more strength will look after the one who otherwise would remain behind. Together we are on the way to God, and thus we are responsible for each other.

We can also expand this being "for each other." In today's world we do not want to leave the solidarity with others by individually running ahead. Rather, we want to accept responsibility for all humanity, just as Jesus Christ did it even to being god-forsaken on the cross. Accepting this solidarity with us he was able to redeem all of humanity.

EXCURSUS ON JACOB'S LADDER[35]

This image is an archetype, a primary symbol for the human longing to reach heaven, perhaps also for the longing that someone from heaven come down to the earth. This image is present in many ancient cultures either in the form of a ladder or of stairs. Within the social aspect of life we also speak of ladders in careers: ascent or descent. This image is deeply anchored both in society and in the church. It contains:

- a series of steps, that is, a more or less organic development
- a symbol for psychological and spiritual experiences; Eliade and Jung recall the myths of ascent[36]

Our rules refer to the biblical text of Genesis 28:12-17: Jacob saw "a stairway [that] rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God's messengers were going up and down on it. . . . Jacob said: 'This is nothing else than an abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven!'" In the book of Genesis, the Hebrew word is *sullam*, in the Septuagint it is *climax*, and in the Vulgate it is *scala*. This ladder is rather like an instrument so that the angels can ascend and descend. It provides a connection between heaven and earth. More important for Jacob is the theophany that occurs in a time of his deepest humiliation; it signifies a renewing of the covenant with Abraham. Later this image became a part of the Introit in the liturgy for the dedication of a church.

1. In Jacob's ladder Philo sees the ascent to contemplation. He distinguishes three stages: Abraham as beginner, Jacob as the one making progress, and Isaac as the one who is perfect. Jacob is the fighter who in the night becomes a contemplative. The ladder connects heaven and earth; angels descend and ascend. Yet the ladder also has an anthropological meaning, for

35. Cf. the helpful articles by Puzicha, "Bild"; Cahn, "Ascending" (with bibliography); Gozier, "Echelle"; and Pricoco "Scala" (with many footnotes).

36. Cf. Cahn, "Ascending," 699.

it signifies the life of the ascetic, the ascent of the intellect to what is invisible, the liberation for having a vision of God.

In Origen's polemical work against Celsus the ascent is described as going through seven planetary spheres; the eighth door forms the top. Inspired by Philo, Origen distinguishes the purgative way (*via purgativa*, Proverbs), the illuminative way (*via illuminative*, Ecclesiastes), and the unitive way (*via unitiva*, Song of Songs), or also the beginners (the Israelites), those progressing (the Levites), and the perfect ones (the priests). The ladder symbolizes the spiritual ascent: it has six fundamental (first) stages; the seventh is mystical life.[37]

2. The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* for the first time describes the ladder in detail. They see "a ladder of astonishing height that reaches up to heaven."[38] At its foot lurks a dragon; when stepping on the first step his head is crushed. The ascent requires a struggle. Both women are in the situation of martyrdom that requires perseverance in suffering. They are not to ascend in a dilatory manner but with their eyes turned upward. The ladder is "so narrow that one can only ascend one after the other." The ladder symbolizes effort and hardship but ends in the garden of Paradise. Christ is standing at the end to reward the martyrs. Beginning with this text, the dragon, devil, or a serpent at the side of the ladder become important elements in iconography. Later the devil can also be seen in the middle part of the ladder as he tries to stop those who are ascending while Christ supports them from above.

3. The steps are usually the main content of this image, which presents the progress toward illumination and perfection, a progress encompassing both body and soul and requires that we muster all our energies. According to the different authors the ladder has a different number of steps.

Ambrose speaks about the ascent from a lower stage to perfection. We will climb one step after another in unstoppable progress.[39] The first steps are still close to the ground, but we are not to despise them, for they consist in purifying us from sin and in keeping the commandments. The ladder can also be very simple, beginning with the renunciation of material goods and proceeding to humility, to community with Jesus Christ. According to Orsiesius it ends in heaven.[40] Cassian describes various ladders or sequences. In *Inst*. 43 he talks about the fear of God, compunction, contempt of possessions, humility, and finally about the mortification of the will.

37. Cf. Cahn, "Ascending," 707; Philo of Alexandria, *De Somn* 1.133; 1.149; "Echelle Spirituelle" *DS*, 66; Pricoco, "Scala," 43f.

38. *Pass* IV.3-10; see Puzicha, "Bild," 1–2.

39. Ambrose, *In Ps.* 1.18.3-4; Gregory of Nyssa, *VitMos* II.11, 227.

40. Orsiesius, *Lib* 21-22.

The number of the steps is not arbitrarily determined but follows biblical models: Zeno of Verona has twenty-one steps that lead to the perfection of Christian life, a number he derives from the ideals of the New Testament.[41]

Corresponding to the fifteen gradual psalms (Pss 118–32) Jerome has fifteen steps. These psalms are songs about the gradual path toward perfection. We are to ascend slowly without despising the first steps since we cannot rush immediately to the highest step, but we are always to strive higher. The first step is fasting, the second contempt for the world, the third renunciation of sin. We are not to lose heart but rather to look to the lord who is waiting for us on the highest step, who looks at us and helps us.[42] Another image is found in 2 Kings 20:9-11. For Hezekiah the shadow of the sun ascends back up the steps on the staircase. Cassian says it most clearly: on the steps of humility Hezekiah ascends back to the height he had lost by pride.[43]

A third model of the steps are the Beatitudes. Gregory of Nyssa says: "Whoever sets foot on a ladder continues to climb to the next higher. . . . I believe that the sequence of the Beatitudes is laid out like the steps of a ladder and so it is easy in contemplation to climb from one step to the next."[44] The eighth step is the high point of the Beatitudes. Ambrose and Augustine also take the Beatitudes as the model of the ascent to perfection in eternity.[45] For Augustine the first step is humility, the second knowledge of the divine Scriptures, the third sorrow over the loss of the highest good, the fourth hardship so that the spirit may rise, the fifth enduring hardship, the sixth purity of heart, the seventh contemplation of truth (*contemplation veritatis*), and the last, the eighth, the return to the starting point.[46]

A brief look to the *Scala Paradisi*, the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, by Climachus. In his thirty steps he first describes how far removed the earthly goods are (1–7, beginners), then the battle against sins and the acquiring of the virtues (7–26, those who are advancing), and finally love (27–30, those who have become perfect). Climachus compares the thirty steps of the ladder to the thirty years of Jesus' life.[47]

Even today the image of the ladder speaks to us as it includes the old knowledge that the soul approaches God step by step, that she is to continue doing so patiently without leaving out anything by jumping ahead, that she has to cover a spiritual path that normally has specific stages.

41. Zeno, *Tract* 1.37.11-15; Puzicha, "Bild," 18f.
42. Jerome, *In Ps.* 119.1.
43. *Inst.* XI.10.3.
44. *VitMos* II.227; *De Beat* 1.1207f.; VIII.1.1291f.; Puzicha, "Bild," 20.
45. Ambrose, *In Ps.* 1.18.3f.; *In Lc.* 5.60.
46. *S. Dom mont* I.30; see also Chrysostom, *In Mt* 18.4.
47. Climachus, *Scala*; art. "Eschelle Spirituelle," *DS*, 69.

Some marginal notes: Since Ignatius of Antioch authors have been speaking of the cross of Christ as the lever that lifts us up and of faith as the rope that pulls us up. Love is the path that leads up to God. Zeno of Verona says: "But the ladder's true name is 'cross' for through the cross the Lord Jesus Christ brought together and to completion all the secrets, . . . and has opened the path to heaven to all who follow him."[48]

The Lord stands at the top, lends a hand to those who are exhausted from the ascent, and supports those who are no longer able to climb.[49]

Later we find a monastic explanation that says that this ladder is erected in the monastery.[50]

THE FIRST STEP OF HUMILITY (7.10-30)

In contrast to Cassian's signs of humility RM incorporated this step as the first one, and this means that fear of God is no longer seen as a presupposition for humility[51] but rather is practically integrated into the ladder of humility. The first and the tenth steps of humility are inspired by the two Rules of Basil. Unlike Cassian, RB and RM change the description into an exhortation that is supported by many biblical quotes.

The first step does not contain much that is new but continues a thought from RB 4 (RM 3).[52] In the introduction to this step Benedict says:

V. 10: The first step of humility is when a person keeps the fear of God always before his eyes and flees oblivion altogether. (*Primus itaque humilitatis gradus est si, timorem Dei sibi ante oculos semper ponens, oblivionem omnino fugiat*)

The marks of how Benedict changed RM—mentioned in the introduction to RB (above 131ff.)—hold true here. He does not say that one has to climb onto the first step and also avoids the word "disciple." About the word "the first" (*primus*), we can say similar things as in RB 5.1: "The fundamental step of humility is obedience without delay." This word designates a principal step, a step that is fundamental and of primary importance. For we can never say that we have grown past the fear of God.

In reading this text we will certainly have difficulties. Even the fundamental expression of the "fear of God" is foreign to us as we connect it with

48. Zeno, *Tract* 1.37; translation according to Puzicha, "Bild," 17.

49. Augustine, *In Ps.* 44.18; Jerome *Ep.* 54.6.5.

50. Eucharius, *De laude heremi* 38.

51. *Inst.* IV.39.1: "The beginning of our salvation and the preserving of it is the fear of the Lord."

52. Vogüé *IV*, 291–301; concerning this step see also Borias, "Souvenir."

fear of punishment, a fear that seems unworthy of an adult person. This step appears to us quite negative, with its many references to sins, vices, and even hell. Today his text seems to me like a "thorn in the flesh" that spurs us on to ponder why referring to these realities might be useful even today; yet the historical reality of Benedict's monks must also be considered. Apparently at that time it was more often a matter of a conversion away from a sinful life; thus the text is to exhort us to take conversion seriously and to enter the first phase of the spiritual life. And it seems that Benedict had to shake up his monks a bit so that they would fathom something of the seriousness of their situation.

Another preliminary remark: In comparison with RM it is astonishing how often Benedict omitted mentioning the devil, hell, and its descriptions as well as the description of the vices—or at least weakened them. In my opinion he established a better balance. He does not deny the dark reality; it does exist,[53] but we are not to let them frighten us. Seeburger shows that fear can actually be a strong motivating factor, e.g., for alcoholics, and thus the fear of a relapse would often be described a "hell."[54] Generally the church fathers and monastic authors distinguish between the servile, slavish fear, whose motivation is fear of punishment, and the childlike fear, the fear of not offending God, which Augustine calls the "pure fear" (*timor castus*).[55]

Faith and the veneration of God as a consequence of the fear of God liberates human beings from the fear of everything that is created and may threaten them, be it in the world of today or in the future. Fear of God has nothing to do with a normal or morbid human anxiety but rather liberates from it. Fear of God is an expression of the acceptance, reverence, and veneration that human beings show to God, and for Benedict it is a sign that a person lives in the presence of God and in this light also perceives human beings, especially those who are weak. "Fear of human beings leads to slavery, fear of God leads to freedom."[56]

It is worthwhile to note that the text says that we keep the *fear of God before our eyes*. We would have expected: God himself or his presence. This expression is possibly influenced by the Latin text of Psalm 35/36:2 in the *Psalterium Romanum*: *Dixit iniustus ut delinquat in semetipso, non est timor Dei ante oculos eius.* The unjust does not have the fear of God before his

53. Cf. *gehenna* and *infernum* (hell) occur twenty-three times in RM; in RB, seven times.

54. Seeburger, "Humility"; in contrast Kardong, "Clarifications," 12–22.

55. Augustine, *CivDei* XIV.9; *In Ps.* 18.1.10; Cassian, *Conf.* XI.11-13.4.

56. Puzicha, 154, with reference to Cassiodorus, *In Ps.* 33.12. With regard to the biblical fear of God, see Nowell, "Fear of the Lord"; art. "Crainte de Dieu," *DS*; Kardong, "Biblical Roots."

eyes.[57] We can also recall Psalm 100/101:3-4: "I do not allow into my presence anyone who speaks perversely. Whoever acts shamefully, I hate. . . . I shun the devious of heart; the wicked I will not tolerate." Here too, a person has something before his eyes, or rather avoids it not to have deviousness before his eyes. Jerome said about this verse: "I preferred nothing to the Lord, but rather was totally turned to the Lord."[58]

A human being flees oblivion altogether, everywhere. There is no explicit indication to what this oblivion refers. Holzherr describes it as practical atheism: "being in bondage to material things, evading the question of meaning, and connected with it self-alienation, the lack of antennas for anything spiritual and a thoughtless conformism."[59] When my heart forgets, I forget myself. Total oblivion, forgetting is like extinguishing my own self. In today's world one of the most important functions of monasteries perhaps lies in the fact that they are concrete reminders of God. A true mission! In contrast to RM, Benedict even sharpened the expression: fleeing oblivion altogether (*omnino*), not only at every hour (*omni hora*). A saying of the Fathers states: "There are three virtues of Satan that precede all sins: oblivion, negligence, and concupiscence. Oblivion gives rise to negligence. . . . When a human being rejects oblivion, he does not fall into negligence."[60]

This step can be written as a circular construction:

A **10** The first step of humility is
When a person keeps the fear of God always before his eyes
And flees oblivion altogether.
11 Continually he is to think of all that God commanded
and ponder always within himself how the fire of hell
is burning because of the sins of those who despise God,
and how eternal life is prepared for those who fear God.
12 And at every hour he is to be on his guard against sins and faults,
that is, of thoughts, tongue, hands, and feet
and of self-will, but also of the desires of the flesh.

57. The text of *Ps Rom* continues: *quoniam dolose egit in conspectu eius ut inveniret iniquitatem suam et odium*: for he acted deceitfully in [God] eyes and so would come to injustice and hate.

58. *In Ps.* 100.3; Arnobius describes the opposite situation: "There is no fear of God before his eyes so that he finds injustice and hatred. . . . He does not want to see good actions."

59. Holzherr 2016, 150f., he also refers to Basil, *Reg* 2.106-11; in the last sentence there is the expression "he arrives in oblivion."

60. *VitPat* V.11.46; also Basil, *Reg* 2.70 emphasizing that fear of the Lord is the beginning.

B **13** Man is always to ponder
that God looks down on him from heaven at every hour
and that his actions in every place are seen by God's eye
and are reported by the angels every hour.

C **14** The prophet indicates this
when he shows God as being always present in our thoughts
by saying: "God searches our hearts and kidneys";
15 and also: "The Lord knows the thoughts of human beings";
16 and also: "You know my thoughts from afar";
17 and: "the thought of man will be revealed to you."
18 But in order to keep watch over his perverted thoughts
conscientiously
the useful brother should always say in his heart:
"Then I am blameless before him
when I guard myself against my malice."
[RM: "against sins of tongue, hands and feet."]

D **19** Truly, we are forbidden to do our self-will
since Scripture tells us:
"Turn away from your wills" [*voluntatibus*].

E **20** And in the same way we beg God in prayer
that his will be done in us.

D' **21** Rightly we are thus taught
not to do our will,
but to guard ourselves from what Scripture says:
"There are ways that seem right to human beings,
whose end, however, leads down into the depth of hell."
22 In the same way we dread the word
that is said about the negligent:
"Corrupt are they and have become abominable
in their wills [willful acts]."

C' **23** Even in the desires of the flesh we want to believe
that God is always present, since the prophet says
to the Lord: "All my desires lie open before you."
24 Therefore let us guard ourselves from every evil craving;
for death stands at the threshold of pleasure.
25 For this reason Scripture commands us saying:
"Do not follow your desires!"

B' **26** Thus, if the eyes of the Lord look upon the good and the evil ones
27 and the Lord always looks down from heaven on the children of men
to see if there is yet anyone who understands and seeks God,
28 and if the angels that are appointed to us
report day and nights our actions and works,

A' **29** then we must guard ourselves, brothers, at every hour so that not,
as the prophet says in the psalm, God at some hour
see us as we turn to evil and thus become useless,
30 and sparing us at that time because he is merciful and expects
that we change for the better, that he not tell us some future day:
"this you did, and I was silent."

Many texts by Basil admonish us always to remember that God is present.[61] For the first step RM has taken its inspiration from them. Yet in contrast to RM this step in RB has a well-developed chiastic structure. And its center is a positive statement, that the will of God be done in us (v. 20), which is not the case in RM.

A and A' describe the last possibilities that are opposed to each other: hell, corruption / heaven, conversion. B and B' talk about the eyes of God that are always present and about the angels that report to God. C and C' are small quotes (*florilegia*) about the "thoughts," i.e., the desires (with some synonyms), and the characteristic word is repeated five times (thoughts, desires). This also occurs in D–E–D' with regard to the will (or the willful acts); yet here in the center the will (the will of God) is positively mentioned (flanked by two negative statements regarding the will).

An overview of the first step shows clearly that it deals mainly with the purification from sins. Expressions of sin and their consequences prevail, also verbs of guarding oneself and, at the end, of conversion. All this is connected with the motivation that God is always present. This first step of humility is primarily shaped by quotations from psalms, toward the end there are some quotes from wisdom literature, and in the center we find a quote from Matthew. Thus its spirituality is closely connected to the psalms.

Expressions such as "always," "at every hour," "everywhere" occur thirteen to fourteen times and characterize this step. Alarmed, we might ask how one could even live in this way. On the one hand, the intensity of the expressions probably indicates that people did not really live in this manner, not even in the time of the Master or Benedict (or why would anyone use such radical, almost exaggerated, expressions?); on the other, we can point to RB 19, which refers to this step. "Always and everywhere, so we believe, is God's presence; yet especially we should believe it without a doubt when we attend the Divine Office" (19.1-2). There exists, as the French say, a *moment fort*, a significant, intense time when we have the chance to begin practicing everything that the first step of humility recommends: the Liturgy of the Hours, which itself is shaped mainly by the psalms. To live under the eyes of God, to let his look

61. *Reg* 34; 46; 60; 66; 79; 86; 108. These texts use many of the same scriptural quotes as the first step.

penetrate everything, and thus to be cleansed! In further chapters of his Rule Benedict also provides helpful hints for living the first step.

In a concrete manner we may imagine that many oratories and churches of his time probably had in the apse, as the old Christian basilicas show, a representation of the raised Christ on a golden (or dark blue) background, indicating his divinity and being surrounded by angels or saints—the Lord who looks with large eyes on the assembly. The liturgy takes place before his face and is a model for our entire life. When we have negative associations with the eyes of God as a means for punishment ("God sees everything, even in the basement"), then it is beneficial to think of some biblical texts and to ponder how Jesus looks at people full of love and mercy (Matt 9:36; John 1:48) even though he knows the extent of our misery. We might also think of Isaiah 43:4: "You are precious in my eyes . . . maggot Israel."

Bernard of Clairvaux contrasts this step with habitual sinning. We no longer pay any attention to God;[62] Benedict here speaks of oblivion, negligence, and despising of God.

Vv. 11-12: Continually he is to think of all that God commanded and to ponder always within himself how the fire of hell is burning because of the sins of those who despise God, and how eternal life is prepared for those who fear God. And at every hour he is to be on his guard against sins and faults, that is, of thoughts, of tongue, hands, and feet, and of self-will, but also of the desires of the flesh. (*et semper sit memor omnia quae praecepit Deus, ut qualiter et contemnentes Deum gehenna de peccatis incendat et vita aeterna quae timentibus Deum praeparata est animo suo semper evolvat. Et custodiens se omni hora a peccatis et vitiis, id est cogitationum, linguae, manuum, pedum vel voluntatis propriae sed et desideria carnis,*)

This text finds its corresponding verses (29-30) at the end of the step, in A'. As A mentions the last things of the next world—hell or eternal life—similarly, A' mentions at the end the last things in this life: at every hour turning to evil and eventually becoming "useless" or, on the other side, converted to a better life. The two opposites to the fear of God are expressed negatively in verses 10-11: oblivion, sins of the various human abilities. As a contrast there are positive expressions: to have the fear of God always before our eyes, always to remember what God commands. In A', 29-30 the opposites are: renegade and corrupt, and conversion to a better life. Both texts emphasize the "always," and in the expression of RM 10.11 ("to despise the Lord"), Benedict changes *Dominus* to *Deus* in A' (v. 11). Yet here it is also the mer-

62. *Steps of Humility and Pride* XXI.51f. (hence quoted as *Steps*). Cf. also Cyprian, *Ep.* 58.11.

ciful God who has expectations of us. With clarity these "frames" (A and A') show the necessity of converting from sins.

In verse 12 we see a long enumeration of sins against which we need to guard ourselves: sins of thoughts, tongue, hands, feet, self-will, and the desires of the flesh. This is copied from RM and then continues to follow this list and ponders the presence of God in each of these six areas (RM 10.20-29, tongue, hands, and feet). In his following explanations Benedict omits—less logically—the sins of tongue, hands, and feet and limits himself to three internal areas of thoughts, (self-)will, and desires, with the effect that in his text the will is in the center.

Continually he is to think of all that God commanded. It is easier to understand that a brother always thinks of what comes from God, especially when we go back to the root of the Latin word *prae-cipere*. We can translate it as to think ahead, imagine, entrust something to someone, and naturally also command. Certainly God is not about to give us orders like a sergeant; he knows what makes us basically free and joyful (not only as individuals); thus—humanly speaking—he thinks ahead and entrusts obligations to us, for example, the Ten Commandments that are to facilitate a good way of living together with others. We are always to think of this, but this is only one side. God is always thinking of us.

And [he is] to ponder always within himself how the fire of hell is burning because of the sins of those who despise God. Those who despise God (and not only the Lord, as RM says)—this may shock us internally, but apparently it does happen, and with it there is also the possibility that such persons end up in hell. For heaven means to live with God, but if someone despises God, there is no room for him near God. Might Benedict really have reckoned with such persons around him? In any case he did insert this thought from RM as a deterrent.[63] The New Testament says that Jesus too threatened with hell (*gehenna*) in order to intensify his demands (cf. Matt 5:22; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5). The depictions of hell with fire, etc., are not a big topic in the first Christian centuries and only become one beginning with Augustine and Gregory the Great.[64] In contrast to Origen, the Synod of Constantinople of 543 ascertained that hell was eternal. I presume that RM and afterward RB were influenced by the *Vision of Paul* (*Visio Pauli*) that also figures in the background of the angels who bring reports of our actions to God. This apocryphal vision depicts the fire of hell extensively.[65]

63. Yet he inserts it much less often than RM. We may also think of the "Exercises" of St. Ignatius of Loyola that contain a meditation about hell.

64. Cf. art. "Hölle," in *LThK* and in *TRE*.

65. Cf. "Hölle" in *TRE*, 449f., and *Visio Pauli*.

How shall we live with such texts today? It seems to me that this depends on what Benedict tries to obtain by using them: turning away from sins, conversion. I believe that we also could insert here the expression "model of action." What is its goal? This question does not weaken the radical nature of the statement. But then we need to advance creatively by different—perhaps small—steps in the direction of the goal, of conversion. This interpretation would be one possibility of not simply ignoring the sentence yet also reflecting on the seriousness of our situation.

Eternal life is prepared for those who fear God. Fear of God is repeated here again and, judging from the context, seems to indicate that sins are to be avoided (cf. also Prol.17; 12). Here the fear of the beginners seems to be stressed even more. Yet it is a consoling thought that God has already prepared eternal life for those who fear him. He is "thinking ahead" and knows—speaking with an image—how he wants to bless us.

Continually he is to think of all . . . and to ponder within himself. The brother keeps this always in his mind. *Animus* can presumably be translated by "heart."[66] The Latin verb *evolvat* actually means to unfold, study, develop, ponder something point by point. What is at stake here are images of belief that always accompany people as well as the moving back and forth of God's thoughts. In Latin this is described with two expressions: *semper sit memor* (continually he is to think of) and *animo suo semper evolvat* (always is to ponder within himself). These strong expressions seem to indicate something similar to a repeated ejaculatory prayer. If we look at other texts in RB it might concretely be "O God, come to my assistance; Lord make haste to help me" (18.1; 35.17). Yet Benedict does not prescribe a specifically formulated ejaculatory prayer to all his monks. But we can assume that such a practice, or a similar one, existed.

Verse 11 presents the two ways, to hell or to eternal life, a model that has existed as a classical topic of spirituality since antiquity. It is designed to motivate people to make a decision for God. In the same way it is used in RM and RB. Decision against sin, total decision for God!

At every hour he is to be on his guard against sins. Here six areas are listed, beginning with thoughts (corresponding to monastic tradition), then the tongue with its facility to sin (cf. also Prol.17). Third, the sins of the hands are mentioned, perhaps thinking of greediness or smaller or larger acts of violence. Fourth, apparently even the feet can sin; probably when going in the wrong direction or when being used against a neighbor. In what follows Benedict omits the last three areas because he is more intent on talking about the internal areas where God is present. At this point RM has three

66. Cf. Böckmann, "Der Mensch," 43, on *animus*, which is not a favorite word of Benedict.

paragraphs and warns of empty talk, of unfinished actions, and of fleeing from God. Benedict omits these paragraphs and follows RM again where the Master speaks of self-will and desires. Both authors want to set the human person before the all-knowing God. Because of Benedict's omission the alignment with God's will is now placed in the center of this step.

The verses in B and B' (vv. 13 and 26-28) are very similar. They speak of the eyes of the Lord, or of God, that always look at us and also that by day and by night, at every hour, angels report our actions to God. Both parts talk in general about human persons or "children of men." The description of the angels' reporting comes from verses 7 and 10 in the *Vision of Paul*: "Angels worship the Lord and report the actions of men, everything that a man did from morning to night, be it good or evil. But they also report about it day and night." In Proverbs 15:3 we read: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch over the evil and the good" (quoted in 7.26). Benedict uses this quote also in RB 19 when talking about celebrating the liturgy.

V. 13: Man is always to ponder that God looks down on him from heaven at every hour and that his actions in every place are seen by God's eye and are reported by the angels every hour. (*aestimet se homo de caelis a Deo semper respici omni hora et facta sua omni loco ab aspectu divinitatis videri et ab angelis omni hora renuntiari.*)

Human persons are to spend their entire lives before the eyes of God, and need to ponder this incessantly in their hearts. God sees, watches, looks at us although today we may not primarily think of his punishing eye. How many texts of Sacred Scripture emphasize that God's face is directed onto us, that God sees everything, and not only what we do wrong, but also our tears, our suffering injustice as well as the good we do. We cannot and do not want to escape from his eyes, for this would mean death for us (cf. Ps 138/139). God's loving look envelops us wherever we may be and at every time even when we feel abandoned. For today this might be a necessary complement to this verse, an addition based on the Bible.

Our rules then also speak of the angels that, according to the apocryphal *Vision of Paul*, report to God all our actions and omissions. Perhaps this thought was already envisaged when verse 6 emphasizes that angels ascend and descend on the ladder. They are an image for the close connection between human beings and God. Actually it is not even necessary to say that angels report our doings to God, and we hardly find a similar thought in Sacred Scripture, for God's eyes encompass everything, including everything we do. Perhaps two biblical texts were interpreted in this vein. Satan is called the accuser of men (Rev 12:10), having accused them before God day and night. We might also think of the first two chapters in the book of Job where

the sons of God are assembled and Satan reports about Job (Job 1:9-11; 2:2-5). And Raphael says to Tobiah: "when you [Tobiah and Sarah] prayed, it was I who presented and read the record of your prayers before the Glory of the Lord" (Tobit 12:12). In our rules, however, this is seen more as presentation, an accusing or defending of our human doing before God.

C and C' as well as D, D', and E are five small *florilegia*, literary quotes, and each of these contain a certain word or synonym. C and C' have the prophet speak, with C containing mainly quotes from psalms; C' also has some from wisdom literature. C mentions thoughts (singular and plural) five times; C' names various synonyms: desires of the flesh, desire (twice), pleasure, and concupiscence.

Vv. 14-18: The prophet indicates this when he shows God as being always present in our thoughts by saying: "God searches our hearts and kidneys"; and also: "The Lord knows the thoughts of men"; and: "You know my thoughts from afar"; and "The thought of man will be revealed to you." But in order to keep watch over his perverted thoughts conscientiously, the useful brother should always say in his heart, "Then I am blameless before him when I guard myself against my malice."

In monastic literature "thoughts" (*cogitationes*), mostly used in the plural, almost always have a negative connotation. The word consists of the prefix *co-* and the frequentative of *agere*, that is, *agitare*. Thus it could be a synonym for temptations in the sense of the Greek word *logismos*. When these "thoughts" are small we are to dash them against Christ (Prol.28). This entire part is placed under the idea in verse 12 that we are to guard ourselves against sins and faults, here, of thoughts. In verse 15 Benedict omitted a negative remark found in RM and the *Psalterium Romanum*: God knows the thoughts of men "for they are vain."[67] The end of this paragraph also states that one is to guard oneself against malice (v. 18). Once the thoughts are purified by the (merciful) look of God, they will be able to praise him (v. 17). We need not be afraid and thus may confront our thoughts with trust.

V. 14: The prophet indicates this when he shows God as being always present in our thoughts by saying: "God searches our hearts and kidneys"; (*Demonstrans nobis hoc propheta, cum in cogitationibus nostris ita Deum semper praesentem ostendit dicens: "Scrutans corda et renes Deus" [Ps 7:10];*)

Here we can refer to Pelagius, who said: "May the presence of God always meet your thought; may your spirit be humble and gentle, roused only

67. For thoughts in RB, cf. 1.5; 4.50; 7.44; 65.5; they are all used negatively.

against vices."[68] The scriptural quote from Psalm 7:10 comes from a similar context of good and evil: "Bring the malice of the wicked to an end; uphold the innocent, O God of justice, who tries hearts and minds [kidneys]" (cf. Ps 25/26:2). The Old Testament in particular emphasizes that God tests hearts and kidney.[69] Trust in a just God prevails, and it might be the same in verse 14. "Hearts and kidneys" is a biblical expression for the innermost part of the human being. In the Bible *scrutare / scrutari* is used in warnings, e.g., that God or the Holy Spirit searches and examines our innermost hearts (e.g., 1 Cor 2:10) and that he knows us in our innermost being. Our heart is not to be with fleeting and material things, but rather with God, where our treasure is.[70] For RM and RB this divine knowing is a consequence of God's presence in our innermost being. When considering this verse in itself, the thoughts do not necessarily have to be seen as negative; they only become so because they are placed under the idea of verse 12.

V. 15: and also: "The Lord knows the thoughts of men"; (*et item: "Dominus novit cogitationes hominum" [Ps 93/94:11];*)

The master provided the full text of this psalm verse: *Dominus novit cogitationes hominum, quoniam vanae sunt*. The German Unity translation renders this last part as "they are only a breath of air." Again and again we are confronted with the following hermeneutical question: By omitting the second part of this quote, was it Benedict's intent also to omit the negative descriptions of the thoughts? Seeing this omission together with others I am inclined to answer this in the affirmative, that—at least here—he did it intentionally.[71]

V. 16: and: "You know my thoughts from afar"; (*et item dicit: "Intellegisti cogitationes meas a longe" [Ps 138/139:3];*)

This verse celebrates God's omniscience. God knows us even in our innermost hearts, he envelops us and knows our thoughts before they even arise into words and deeds. Verses 2 and 4 of Psalm 139 read in the English translation: "you understand my thoughts from afar" and "before a word is even on my tongue, you, Lord, know it all." When we consider this psalm verse in a biblical context, it is not menacing, but, on the contrary, encourages us to have confidence. Some church fathers, e.g., Augustine, refer to the

68. Pelagius, *Ep Cel* 19.

69. Cf., e.g., Jer 11:20; 17:10; 20:12.

70. Cf. PsRufinus, *In Ps.* 7.10; Augustine, *In Ps.* 7.9 (v. 10).

71. Cf. Augustine, *In Ps.* 93.14 (v. 11): "Give up . . . human thoughts . . . so that you may understand the thoughts of God."

prodigal son (Luke 15:11-20) who had thoughts of returning when he was still far away. The father then met him as he had seen his thoughts from afar.[72]

V. 17: and: "The thought of man will be revealed to you." (*et: "Quia cogitatio hominis confitebitur tibi" [Ps 75/76:11]*.)

The biblical context deals with God as the Judge of the world and that the human being, full of defiance, in the end still has to acknowledge and confess God, and that ultimately nations and peoples will celebrate him. Verse 11 in the Roman Psalter speaks about the thoughts that will confess God and the remainder of the thoughts will arrange a celebration for God.[73] Could this mean that thoughts are shaped in a positive way? The Latin *confiteri* has two meanings: confess, praise and also admit, confess guilt. The thoughts are the subject of the sentence, thus we might say: however the thoughts are, they will ultimately praise God.

V. 18: But in order to keep watch over his perverted thoughts conscientiously, the useful brother should always say in his heart, "Then I am blameless before him when I guard myself against my malice." (*Nam ut sollicitus sit circa cogitationes suas perversas, dicat semper utilis frater in corde suo: "Tunc ero immaculatus coram eo si observavero me ab iniquitate mea" [Ps 17/18:24]*.)

Here at the end the meaning is evident: we are to guard ourselves against perverted, evil thoughts, and not only this but also to pay attention to them. *Perversus* derives from the Latin verb *pervertere*, meaning turn back, turn around, turn inside out, and also wrong, perverted, and eventually unjust, bad, evil. May we conclude from this that not all thoughts ought to be marked as evil but only those that divert us from the right path and refer to what is forbidden? It is quite clear that it is difficult to keep our thoughts under control.

For this reason the useful brother always recites a psalm verse in his heart. He is "useful" (*utilis*), good, fit, able. We may point to the branch of the vine that is useful when it bears fruit (John 15:1-8). The closest biblical passage is 2 Timothy 2:21: "If anyone cleanses himself of these [evil] things, he will be . . . beneficial to the master of the house, ready for every good work." The ejaculatory psalm prayer is always said, and not only with the lips, but later also in the heart. Similar to the Jesus prayer, it has made its way from the mouth to our inside, our heart.

72. Augustine, *In Ps.* 138.5 (vv. 3-4).

73. *et reliquiae cogitationum diem festum agent tibi.* Cassiodorus, *In Ps.* 75.11 holds firm to the confession of sins; cf. also PsJerome, *In Ps.* 75.11; Augustine, *In Ps.* 75.14 (v. 11) states that this is aimed toward conversion.

What is at stake here is purity of heart, actually its first stage, the purification from sins, here from "my malice." This again picks up a thought of verse 12, namely, that the brother is to guard himself from all sins, presumably those in thoughts. He is on the purgative way, which seems to begin with his paying attention to his thoughts. In fact, however, the last biblical quote does not explicitly mention thoughts. Psalm 17/18:24-25: "I was blameless before him, I was on guard against sin. So the Lord rewarded my righteousness, the cleanness of my hands is in sight."[74] The Latin *iniquitas* in the psalm is the opposite of *aequitas*, that is, an inappropriate, unjust, even hostile attitude.[75]

In this small passage we can recognize the tradition of the monastic Desert Fathers with their emphasis on being attentive to one's thoughts and their awareness that thoughts quickly turn into temptations. As an example, we only mention Cassian's *Conference* X that deals with the unceasing prayer, "O God, come to my assistance." Whenever depressed by thoughts, a monk prays this prayer, which expels all inappropriate thoughts and also helps to steady thoughts.[76] This is a matter of replacing the thoughts that come with good thoughts about God. The later paragraph about the desires of the flesh (vv. 23-25) corresponds to this one.

In the center of the first step we have a number of quotes, a *florilegium*, about the will. D and D' speak of *voluntates*, wills—perhaps willful acts—in the plural and in a negative sense, and D goes yet further in using negative images, especially with regard to the consequences. Self-will (*voluntas propria*) is negative as well as my/our self-will (*mea, nostra voluntas*), and is opposed to the will of God. (Not my, but Thy will in its monastic interpretation; cf. Luke 22:24.) In RB "one's own" (*proprium*) is always opposed to communal. Someone is self-willed, willful, stubborn, does what he or she wants, when and where he or she wants. Will in the plural (*voluntates*)—a possible English translation might be "willful acts"—are also negative and designate different ambitions that pull us to and fro and are not clearly connected to God. German has the word *Eigenwillen* (literally the will that is my

74. PsRom 17:24-25: *Et ero immaculatus coram eo et observabo me ab iniquitate mea. Et retribuet mihi Dominus secundum iustitiam meam et secundum innocentiam manuum mearum in conspectu oculorum eius.* (The NAB translation says "I was honest before him," which, according to Webster, means mainly truthful, free from deceit, which is narrower than "blameless."—Trans.)

75. This word occurs frequently in the Latin psalms.

76. See Puzicha, *Quellen*, 125. When the spirit is deceived by a bad thought, the spirit also says this prayer (X.10.11); it helps when thoughts are fickle (X.10.11) and brings them back to steadfastness (*stabilitatem cogitationum*, X.10.12). Eventually the monk repudiates all the richness of thoughts (*cunctarum cogitationem divitias*, X.11.1).

own) or of *Eigenwilligkeit* (willfulness).[77] Vogüé wonders why the sequence is not: thought, wish, will—which would be more logical.[78] Yet in my opinion, Benedict seems to be intent on placing the will into the center of this step.

V. 19: Truly, we are forbidden to do our self-will since Scripture tells us: "Turn away from your wills" [*voluntatibus*]. (*Voluntatem vero propriam ita facere prohibemur cum dicit scriptura nobis: "Et a voluntatibus tuis avertere" [Sir 18:30].*)

At this point the Master had once again emphasized the presence of God when mentioning self-will. This verse contains "will" (*voluntas*) twice, first in the singular, the second time in the plural. First, he says "self-will" (*voluntas propria*, cf. also RB 5.7). Stubborn self-will may be in us, yet what matters is not to remain bound to it and to act accordingly. The scriptural quote occurs again in the following passage. In its full form (translated directly from the Latin), it says: "Do not follow your desires and withdraw from your will." In the text of Sirach 18:30 desires and will appear as parallels. This does not concern every kind of will but rather the desires. The NAB translation says: "Go not after your lusts, but keep your desires in check. If you satisfy your lustful appetites, they will make you the sport of your enemies." The German Unity translation[79] says: "Do not follow your desires, keep away from your appetites. When you satisfy what your soul desires, you will fulfill what your enemy desires" (18:30f.). Our two monastic authors say "turn away from your wills." According to RM and RB the plural of "will" designates the various willful desires (appetites) that pull us back and forth; there is no clear direction toward God. We could say: Turn away from this back and forth, and turn to the One.

V. 20: And in the same way we beg God in prayer that his will be done in us. (*Et item rogamus Deum in oratione ut fiat illius voluntas in nobis [Matt 6:10].*)

In comparison with RM *Dominus* is here changed to *Deus*. The Master saw Christ so much as father that he even was able to address the "Our Father" to Christ. Yet is it quite clear that Benedict wanted to have this prayer of Christ addressed to God the Father.[80] In contrast to the Vulgate both authors say that

77. Holzherr 2016, 156f, even speaks of *Willkürwillen*, that is, the will to arbitrariness. When seeing RB as a whole, we can see a transformation of the will (*voluntas*), as discussed in RB 5, p. 92.

78. Vogüé *IV*, 295–98.

79. A translation done by Catholic and Protestant theologians, published in 1980, for the use in Catholic churches in Germany.

80. In the parallel text RM even says, "And we also ask the Lord in the Our Father . . ." (10.31).

his will be done *in us*." In patristic texts we find this variation in Cyprian.[81] We may assume that Benedict and RM were influenced by Cyprian in this formulation, which transfers the emphasis to *in us*. It is easy to say this prayer in general, yet here it directly concerns the human individual and all that is done, thought, and intended, which now is to be changed and renewed by the will of God. In this core part the aim of the first step is made very clear: God's will is to form us through and through. It is also evident that in this process the sins are to be melted away! God's will is his salvific will. Associations to the crucifying will of God may also come into play for us, yet that is not intended. Rather, God's will is to break through in me—and naturally also in the entire world. What opposes this will is sin, and the preceding and the following verses say: self-will and willfulness.[82]

V. 21: Rightly we are thus taught not to do our will but to guard ourselves from what Scripture says: "There are ways that seem right to human beings, whose end, however, leads down into the depth of hell." (*Docemur ergo merito nostram non facere voluntatem cum cavemus illud quod dicit sancta scriptura: "Sunt viae quae putantur ab hominibus rectae, quarum finis usque ad profundum inferni demergit" [Prov 16:25; 14:12],*)

The scriptural quote substantiates the beginning of the sentence: "Sometimes a way seems right to a man, but the end of it leads to death" (Prov 16:25; same text also in 14:12).[83]

The saying from Scripture is quoted very freely, and death is equated with the depths of hell. This probably shows that both authors are influenced by Cassian.[84] This also radicalized the text; Benedict may intentionally want to scare us (*cavemus* means to guard oneself, to beware). Again hell appears as a menacing possibility, yet the path seemed straight and right. Certainly, each person can only see a part of the path. But how can we avoid what is dreadful? Our authors say: We are being taught not to do our own will. In connection with the preceding verse we can say: It is the will that opposes the will of God, it is "our" and not "his" will, in the sense of our self-will. And by following this will and our own notions we may get lost quickly. Taking up once more the image of the paths it becomes clear that we need a guide, a spiritual director,

81. *De dom. or.* 14. First he quotes Scripture, "Thy will be done in heaven as it is on earth," but in explaining this he says that "God's will be done in us. That it may be done in us, there is need of God's will." Although Vogüé mentions Cyprian as a source for RM (esp. for the Master's explanation of the Lord's Prayer), he has no reference to Cyprian for RM 10.31.

82. Cf. Kardong, "Self-Will."

83. Eusebius, *Hom* 38.3 uses the same scriptural quote; cf. Puzicha, *Quellen*, 127.

84. *Conf.* XX.9.5: "for there are paths that seem right in the sight of men, but they arrive finally at the depths of hell."

an authority, or Sacred Scripture (cf. Prol.21: "under the guidance of the Gospel"), and ultimately the person of Christ himself. We can be appalled at the certitude of the Pharisees who felt so sure to know their way.[85]

V. 22: In the same way we dread the word that is said about the negligent: "Corrupt are they and have become abominable in their wills." (*et cum item pavemus illud quod de neglegentibus dictum est: "Corrupti sunt et abominabiles facti sunt in voluntatibus suis" [Ps 13:1].*)

This verse continues in "creating fear." We are trembling (*pavere*), quaking in fear and terror. For monks, being negligent seems to be a dreadful possibility. Indifference, lack of consideration, hardening, obstinacy—all this may come into play.[86] Psalm 13/14:1 is quoted again: "Fools say in their heart: 'There is no God.' Their deeds are loathsome and corrupt." Yet after verse 1 the Roman Psalter translated: "They are corrupt and have become abominable in their wills," and RM and RB directly follow this translation.

The root of the Latin verb *corrumpere* is *rumpere* (to break, to tear) and means tearing to pieces, deforming, ruining completely, which then is also applied to the moral level. Such persons are abominable in their "wills" (in the plural), their feelings that pull them to and fro, to whatever they are craving at the moment. Psalm 13/14:3-4 further states, "All have gone astray, all alike are perverse," calling such people evildoers without insight.

We need to try to place ourselves into a monastery of the sixth century. Why were such texts used? We may also think of the abbot's speech in which he scolds a sinful brother in RM: "O wretched soul . . . you lie to Christ . . . you rebelled against God" (RM 13.9, 11, 13). And as in the psalms he says: "You planned wickedness, set out on the wrong way . . . he was a champion of iniquity . . . hated discipline . . . you gave your mouth free rein for evil . . . he put his trust in his own worthlessness. There was no fear of God before his eyes," and at the end, "hell is waiting to burn you" (RM 13.17, 20-21, 33-34, 40). Castigating words spoken to rough sinners! Their aim is a true conversion. Benedict followed the text of RM only in RB 7, but not in the Master's punishing speeches, and thus shortened the Master's text considerably. Still, some expressions remained and, as in RM, are to motivate impertinent monks to desist from sinning. Again, this is a question for us today: What pushes us to turn radically to God? And further: What steps—even small ones—do we take toward this goal?

85. Heufelder, *The Way to God*, 53.

86. Negligent—this actually derives from *neg-legere*. They do not read the reality that is determined by God and his will. They disregard it and apparently also do not want to "read."

The next paragraph speaks five times of the cravings of the flesh (or of synonyms).

Vv. 23-25: Even in the desires of the flesh let us believe that God is always present as the prophet says to God: "All my desire lies open before you." Therefore let us be on guard against every evil desire, for "death is stationed at the threshold to pleasure." This is why Scripture commands: "Do not pursue your cravings" (Sir 18:30).

V. 23: Even in the desires of the flesh let us believe that God is always present as the prophet says to God: "All my desire lies open before you." (*In desideriis vero carnis ita nobis Deum credamus semper esse presentem.*)

Desideria carnis is used three times in RB, always in a negative sense.[87] It denotes the desire of the earthy, lower human being (in the biblical sense), his appetite and his lower appetites. *Caro* describes human beings inasmuch as they are weak and prone to sinning.[88] The Latin word *de-sidus* indicates that something is missing and thus we feel a desire. We may think of Galatians 5:19-21, which lists the "works of the flesh" as "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions." Yet God is always present, even in our lowest desires.

V. 23b: as the prophet says to God: "All my desire lies open before you." (*cum dicit propheta Domino: "Ante te est omne desiderium meum" [Ps 37:10].*)

In both Rules this psalm is prayed to the Lord, i.e., to Christ. It is the lament of a sick person and 37/38:10 says: "my deepest yearning is before you." This, as well as the verse in the Roman Psalter, is not negative in itself. Yet our two rules still use it in a negative sense as proof that God is present in the desire of the flesh. This use of Scripture does not correspond to the verse's original meaning! And thus we have the possibility to interpret this sentence in accordance with Sacred Scripture that does stand above the Rule. We may even use it as a short prayer.

V. 24: Therefore let us be on guard against every evil desire, for "death is stationed at the threshold to pleasure." (*Cavendum ergo ideo malum desiderium quia mors secus introitum delectationis posita est [Gen 4:7].*)

87. Cf. RB 4.59; 7.12, 23.

88. Besides the verses mentioned above, cf. also 1.5; 25.4. Cf. Böckmann, "Der Mensch," 41f. RB uses the word *caro* in the biblical sense while RM uses it more in the neoplatonic sense.

This "scriptural" verse is probably a direct quote from the *Passio Sebastiani*,[89] stating that for anyone fighting against concupiscence, God placed death at the threshold of carnal desires. Thus pleasure and desire are seen as very negative. In our rules both the verb *delectari* and the noun *delectatio* occur mostly with negative connotations, indicating pleasures that are combined with temptations; in Latin the word is often a synonym for *voluptas*, enjoyment.[90] As soon as *delectatio*/pleasure enters (*introitus*), there is the danger of corruption; therefore we have to conclude that it is better to close the door. *Delectatio* is usually positive, here negative, probably because of the sources; it is used in Basil and Cassian at times negatively, at other times positively, depending on the object of the pleasure.[91]

In the first basic step of monastic life, pleasure may refer more to forbidden things, and from there it is understandable that is has negative connotations. Yet we need to remember that at the end of RB 7, in verse 69 (as well as RM 10.90), pleasure (*delectatio*) refers to the virtues and is thus used in a positive sense. The monastic now finds all the human tendencies, even desire and pleasure, in God, the liturgy, Sacred Scripture, that is, generally in good things. When we see verse 24 together with verse 69, we may certainly say that Benedict (and RM) did not want a life without pleasure or joy; rather, pleasure is given a positive value, is transformed as well as the will and all egotistical strivings.

V. 25: This is why Scripture commands: "Do not pursue your cravings." (*Unde scriptura praecepit dicens: "Post concupiscentias tuas non eas" [Sir 18:30].*)

The word "concupiscence" normally has a negative value. In the same vein, RB 4.6 says "do not covet" (*non concupiscere*). Still *concupiscentia* is positive in RB once, in an addition to RM, when Benedict says in RB 4.46 that the monk desires eternal life with "spiritual desire" (*concupiscentia spiritali*).[92] The first part of the same quote is also used in verse 19 (cf. commentary on v. 19). Thus the desires are seen together with the inclinations of self-will. Here the text does not say that we are not to discover any desires in ourselves but rather that we are not to follow them. This may be important for our practice of monastic life.

89. *Passio Sebastiani* IV.14. Its context is: . . . *mortem juxta introitum delectationis posuit, ut his queis libet a mortis timore evadere, vitam aeternam quaerant.*

90. The manuscripts vary, be it for *delectation / dilectatio*, be it for *in voluntatibus / in voluptatibus.* Cf. Hanslik, 47f.; Vogüé *I*, 478.

91. Cf. Basil, *Reg* 4.6; 4.15; 48.1; Cassian, C*onf*. V.4.4; VIII.21.1; *Inst.* X.8.3.

92. In RM this word occurs eight times in a negative sense; cf. also Bamberg, "Vitam aeternam."

Vv. 26-28: Thus, if the eyes of the Lord look upon the good and the evil ones and the Lord always looks down from heaven on the children of men to see if there is yet anyone who understands and seeks God, and if the angels that are appointed to us report day and night our actions and works, (*Ergo si oculi Domini speculantur bonos et malos et Dominus de caelo semper respicit super filios hominum, ut videat si est intellegens aut requirens Deum, et si ab angelis nobis deputatis cotidie die noctuque Domino factorum nostrorum opera nuntiantur,*)

Parallel to verse 13 Benedict returns to the eyes of God, yet expanding the image somewhat. Again we can think of RB 19, of the divine presence around us and of the last verse of this chapter stating that our heart is to be in harmony with our voice, and this also means in harmony with the Bible (19.7). We can say: Sacred Scripture permeates us, forming us ever more deeply; there is con-sonance, con-cordance; there is harmony, and with this life becomes very simple, *simplex* (RB 52.4). Actually, we here see one of the goals of the spiritual life. Smaragdus (285) says: "The eyes of the Lord is the divine gaze with which he always looks upon the good to defend them from the enemy's ambushes, guard them from sins and make them persevere continually in good works."

This passage goes beyond verse 13 by emphasizing that God looks out to see if there is an understanding person who seeks God (*ut videat si est intelligens aut requirens Deum*). We might say: God seeks those who seek God; he yearns for such people and thus looks out and searches for them. We might call this a prelude to RB 58.7, where monastics observe if a new candidate "truly seeks God." Seeking God also seems the most important element in RB 7 and a sign for the fact that a person is understanding (*intelligens*), is correctly "reading" reality. Yet here the image of God's eyes also has an additional element. The quote comes from Psalm 13/14:2: "The Lord looks down from heaven upon the human race to see if even one is wise, if even one seeks God." The Latin text does not have a word corresponding to "even" but expects a totally negative answer, and thus the psalm continues, "All have gone astray, all alike are perverse." (14:3) It is difficult to say if the decadence, coming from the Roman Psalter, also resonates in our two rules. The Latin word *intelligens* also contains an element of "discernment" that is present in the English word "insight." At any rate, the message here is that we try to distinguish, to understand, to gain insight, and to seek God, that we try to look to God for guidance and to do his will.

Vv. 29-30: then we must guard ourselves, brothers, at every hour so that, as the prophet says in the psalm, God does not at some hour see us as we turn to evil and thus become useless, and sparing us at that time because

he is merciful and expects that we change for the better, and that he not say in the future: "This you did, and I was silent." (*cavendum est ergo omni hora, fratres, sicut dicit in psalmo propheta, ne nos "declinantes" in malo et "inutiles factos" [Ps 13:3] aliqua hora aspiciat Deus et, parcendo nobis in hoc tempore quia pius est et expectat nos converti in melius [Eccl 2:13], ne dicat nobis in futuro: "Haec fecisti et tacui" [Ps 49:21].)

Verses 29-30 exhort us that we become not useless but "useful" before God (not: before the Lord, as RM 10.37ff. says).[93] The words "useful" and "useless" remind us of a dead branch, like the one on the vine that needs to be pruned (John 15:1-8). Psalm 13/14 influenced these verses, yet its message then is changed to an exhortation that we not turn to evil and become useless.[94] God looks down upon us, is present, is merciful, and therefore does not immediately punish but rather waits for our conversion, as the New Testament says. "The Lord does not delay his promise . . . but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). Already the book of Sirach had emphasized that God is merciful: "Compassionate and merciful is the Lord; he forgives sins, he saves in times of trouble."[95] Again Benedict changes the word *spectat* to *expectat* (cf. Prol.35) and thus emphasizes that God has expectations of us, giving us time and again opportunities to change for the better.

The negative aspect is expressed here at the end: God saw our bad actions and remained silent. We neglected what we could have seen as an opportunity and simply continued sinning. God does not intervene; he is very patient. Yet this is not a weakness, he will tell us (RM has: "say to us in the judgment to come"; 10.41). Psalm 49/50:21 says: *Haec fecisti et tacui.* The German Unity translation has: "This you did and I should be silent?" The demonstrative relative pronoun "this" (*haec*) points to preceding statements in the Rule: when God has to see us rebelling against him and being useless.

In this manner the first step ends with a serious appeal to conversion but also mentions the positive possibility that we may change for the better and turn our backs to evil. By saying this, these last verses point back to the beginning of the step (vv. 10-12).

93. In any thoughts referring to judgment and in contexts regarding hell Benedict tends to change the word *Dominus*, used in RM, to *Deus*.

94. In the Roman Psalter Ps 13:3 reads: *Omnes declinaverunt, simul inutiles facti sunt . . . non est qui faciat bonum, non est usque ad unum*, which clearly shows decadence. Again, both Rules omitted this.

95. Sir 2:11 in the English edition, 2:13 in the Latin text. Cf. also PsRufinus, *In Ps.* 49.21.

SECOND AND THIRD STEPS OF HUMILITY (7.31-34)

The core message of the first step is to pray that God's will be done in us, and with this we are already very close to the next two steps.

In listing the indications by which perfection may be reached, Cassian began with putting to death all one's desires and then says that the third indication is to submit to an elder's judgment, not to trust one's own (*Inst.* IV.39.2). Once more it is helpful to state that Benedict's introductions to the various steps differ from those in RM. RM 10.42 reads, "The disciple mounts the second rung of humility on the heavenly ladder," yet we already saw that Benedict weakens the ladder motif, probably because he knows its dangers. He also avoids the word "disciple" (in RM to be translated as "pupil") and instead simply says "someone" (*quis*).

Both steps have a similar structure. They begin with stating that the particular step of humility is when someone does something, which is followed by a quote from Scripture that is introduced by the words "he absorbs into himself the voice of the Lord" (*vocem Domini imitetur*), and then in verse 34: "he imitates the Lord, conforms himself to the Lord" (*imitans Dominum*). Both expressions point to Christ the Lord, and the important scriptural texts of John 6:38 and Philippians 2:8 form the two high points. The two steps belong together, though the third step marks an advance when compared to the second. In the second step we do not love our own will but want to obey the Lord, and in the third step this is more clearly described as an imitation of the Lord (*imitatio Domini*), who was obedient unto death, which then is shown concretely in obedience to the superior.

THE SECOND STEP OF HUMILITY (7.31-33)

Vv. 31-33: The second step of humility is when someone does not love his own will and does not find pleasure in fulfilling his desires but imitates the word of the Lord in his actions: "I did not come to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me." In the same way Scripture says: "Self-will brings punishment; obligation a crown." (*Secundus humilitatis gradus est si propriam quis non amans voluntatem desideria sua non delectetur implere sed vocem illam Domini factis imitetur dicentis: "Non veni facere voluntatem meam, sed eius qui me misit" [John 6:38]. Item dicit Scriptura: Voluntas habet poenam et necessitas parit coronam.*)

The line from John 6:38 is very often used in monastic literature and in a literal translation reads: "I have descended from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me." What is at stake here is shown in the next verse, namely, that Jesus does not lose any of those entrusted to him

but rather gives them eternal life. The last verse comes from the *Passion of Anastasia* 17,[96] but has become a truism.

Monastic literature is rich in references for the first part of this step.[97] Generally this word of Jesus is given an ascetical interpretation. In the context of the Christian's status as servant, Basil points out that monastics are to become one another's servant, not simply doing what pleases us, but rather what edifies our neighbor, and thereby "imitating" Christ's will (according to John 6:38).[98]

The first step of humility says that we are to turn away from self-will, are not to act on it. Here, Benedict goes a bit further by saying that we are not to love our self-will; thus we have to descend deeper into our own heart. Once more the pleasures follow. Again the text does not simply say that we do not fulfill them or that we guard ourselves against them, as in the first step, but rather that we find no pleasure in satisfying them. Our preferences have already changed: apparently we already find more pleasure in the things of God. A similar progression is found in 4.51-52 and 53-54. We can also point to Psalm 39/40:9: "To do your will is my delight." *Amare* does not necessarily mean to love but may also mean that we have become accustomed to something (cf. 4.52, 54). This also implies that in general our preference for something increases in the measure that we get accustomed to it.

Here the text states that we "imitate" the word of the Lord in our actions. Studies have shown that such "imitating" does not simply mean an external imitation but rather allowing ourselves to be formed internally, or, expressed more soberly, obeying,[99] to insert ourselves into God's salvific plan, which is precisely the content of the following sentence. In this word of the Lord two wills oppose each other: my will and the will of the one who sent me. Jesus became a real human being and in Gethsemane prayed: "not my will [which is not presented as evil in the Gospel], but yours," a prayer that cost him everything. It was his descending path (his descending ladder, as it were); he came to do God's salvific will, to fulfill the Father's loving plan: salvation for all human beings. And as a result our obedience will insert us into this salvific plan for the entire world, and we become a part of it—it is our ascending path!

96. N. 44: *Irene dixit: Voluntas* (*Acta Sanctorum* 9, April 1, 250: *voluptas) enim habet poenam, et necessitas parat coronam (ms:parit).* Similarly in Optatus, *Liber* VII.1: *voluntas habet poenam, necessitas veniam.* Cf. Augustine, *In Joh.* 26.4 (John 6:44); cf. Kardong, 146.

97. Cf. *HistMon* 31.14; Basil, *Reg* 14-15.

98. *Reg* 12.12-15.

99. Heitmann, *Imitatio Dei*; art. "Mimeomai" in *ThWNT*, thus obedience would be its main content.

This same word from Scripture was quoted in RB 5.13. This forms a parallel to another word of the Lord: "Narrow is the road that leads to life" (Matt 7:14). In the center of chapter 5 Benedict described the cenobites: "They do not live by their own judgment and do not obey their own desires and whims, but walking according to the judgment of and the commands of another, they live in communities and desire to have an abbot over them" (5.12). Then verse 13 says: "without a doubt they imitate the word of the Lord in which he said," and the same quote follows after a similar introduction. Thus 5.12 serves as a paraphrase of this step: when practicing the second step of humility we are true cenobites.

We do not live like the sarabaites who take as "their law what they desire" (1.8; *desideriorum voluptas*), nor like the gyrovagues "who serve their own wills and the cravings of their palates" (1.11). Cenobites internalize Christ's obedience to the Father, thereby embodying it, and this obedience is significant for the salvation of the world. They renounce an egocentric way of life and thus are free for doing the will of God that alone leads to the fullness of life.

The other quote, in my opinion, does not add anything. Though Benedict continues with "Scripture says," the quote is from an apocryphal text, and Benedict copied it from RM. Presumably he thought it was a quote from the Bible, yet it is, as mentioned above, a truism. This is the only place in RB where "will" (*voluntas*) is seen as negative in itself (without an adjective and in the singular). Other manuscripts have "desire," "pleasure" (*voluptas*), and this word is used in the *Passion of Anastasia* in the *Acta Sanctorum*, and Lentini also reads it as *voluptas*.[100]

Necessity brings forth the crown. This describes a spirituality of martyrs; we must not push forward unbidden but must accept reality as it is.

In addition we may think of the New Testament, where Jesus more than once says, "It is necessary" (Greek *deí*,[101] Latin *necesse est*; Luke 2:44), for instance that the Son of Man suffers, that his message is rejected by many. True life arises through death (of Jesus). In the monastic community we find many necessities, which we have to see in the light of reality, be it our own, those of the community, or those of today's world. Many circumstances and conditions have developed over time and cannot be changed very easily and quickly. To realize this and then perhaps to set aside our own wants would correspond to this second step of humility.

In today's society that is always looking for fun and pleasure, this step can also acquire new meaning. Renouncing the desires of the flesh by no means amounts to a loss of sexuality or psychic velleity but rather leads to

100. Lentini, 147. Cf. also n. 96.

101. Cf. Semeraro, "Umiltá" (2008), 81, 83.

an inner freedom with regard to the compulsions of the "pleasure principle" or of addictions. What is meant here is an attitude that avoids two mistakes: repressing our own needs or being ruled by our own impulses. In this second step we consent to a path of inner transformation.[102] We lose the inclination to follow our own desires when we entertain the desires of a loved one.[103]

While Bernard of Clairvaux called the corresponding step the freedom to sin,[104] Benedict here presents a voluntary discipline, or the deliberately chosen narrow path to salvation that leads us into the way of Christ that brings salvation to the world.

THE THIRD STEP OF HUMILITY (7.34)

V. 34: The third step of humility is when someone out of love for God submits to his superior with full obedience, imitating the Lord of whom the Apostle says: "he became obedient even to death." (*Tertius humilitatis gradus est ut quis pro Dei amore omni oboedientia se subdat maiori, imitans Dominum, de quo dicit apostolus: "Factus oboediens usque ad mortem" [Phil 2:8].*)

Basil in particular points again and again to this scriptural passage and to the obedience that goes all the way to death, and this also grounds his radical stance.[105] Cassian says that it is a fruit of the desert when someone submits to the abbot and imitates Christ by being obedient unto death.[106] Abbot Hyperechius said: "The monk's service is obedience which someone has . . . who trustingly stands with the crucified; for the Lord came all the way to the cross and became obedient unto death."[107] Cassian generally describes the parallel indication of humility as being connected with the spiritual guidance of discretion and the judgment of the superior, the elder. RB here focuses on any person who has some responsibility, as Benedict does not use the word "abbot" or "prior" but "superior" (*maior*) as in RB 5.4, 15, and 2.1, which is a more general term. For the monk, monastic obedience now becomes very concrete.

The Master explains this at length; for all practical purposes his explanation is a repetition of his chapter on obedience and of the first step of

102. Cf. Neugschwandtner, *Demut*, 49.
103. Cf. Latteur, "12 Degrees of Humility," 37.
104. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Steps*, XX.50.
105. Cf. *Reg* 65; 69; 83; 126; 131.
106. *Conf.* XIX.6.6.
107. *VitPat* V.14.11.

humility, using similar scriptural quotes. Benedict briefly sums up what is essential and inserts an incisive expression: "for the love of God." Thus he connects this step much more with the second step: the general obedience of the second step is now put in concrete terms as obedience toward a superior. Bernard of Clairvaux called the corresponding step "revolt": a person despises the superior.[108]

A person submits to the one who has some responsibility (*maior*), doing it on his or her own, voluntarily.[109] A true cenobite is a person who serves, or fights, under a rule and an abbot (1.2). In comparison with verses 31-32, the focus is on the intermediaries who mediate the will of God and who, as Benedict knows well, may be very weak (cf. 4.61). In this situation a strong motivation is needed: "for the love of God" (*pro amore Dei*). This addition is easy to understand, yet it interrupts the schematic ascension from fear to love, which Benedict took over from RM, and in which love should appear only in the last step, as it does in RM. Presumably Benedict knows from experience that such obedience can only be mustered "for the love of God." Here it is, however, not clear which genitive *Dei* is: Does it mean "out of love for God" or "out of the love that God gives"? I would opt for the latter. God himself is love and infuses our weakness with his abundance. It is proper to Benedict to see obedience as a matter of love as he expresses it in later chapters in 68.5; 71.4; and 72.6.

The monk obeys the Lord, that is, Christ of whom the Apostle says . . . The apostle is for Benedict always Paul with just one exception. And Christ's obedience to the Father was also an obedience out of love. "For stern as death is love" (Song 8:6).

Obedient until death! Here Benedict quotes the other decisive text about obedience. Obedience is to be given even when it is not clear to the subordinate how everything will fit into God's plan of salvation! The monk must be critical of himself, must make sure that he sees reality in a sober light (and give corresponding reasons), but he knows that he may obey, and in any case can obey as Christ did. The main point is clear: to obey Christ who is speaking through an intermediary. Yet when our hands are tied, when we are at our wits' end, when all seems dark, we may put ourselves into the hands of God and follow Christ who was obedient until death. He obeyed Pontius Pilate even though Pilate certainly made no effort to perceive the will of God. And precisely through this obedience, this suffering obedience, salvation came to the whole world. God's salvific will was—speaking in human terms—by no

108. *Steps* XXI.51-56.

109. Borias, "A l'ecoute," 57: *le moine n'est pas un soumis, il se soumet* ("the monk is not submissive, but submits him- or herself").

means clear through Pontius Pilate. Did Christ recognize this salvific plan? He trusted that his Father was great enough to prevail with his salvific will even against very weak intermediaries. And this, in turn, helps us to find freedom and peace.

RB 68 has a similar message. There we have a dialogue. Yet even when at the end the superior persists in his opinion, the younger monk still may know that the command is good for him (*expedit* literally means it makes him free) and that he may obey out of love, trusting in the help of God. Such acts of obedience are certainly not daily occurrences but may occur in our monastic life, for instance, when we have to accept a new office, when we are sent to a different place, etc. "For the love of God!" Then I am descending into my earthy humanity and my weakness opens me up to receive and accept the love of God, and it is this love that will bring about our obedience. God's strength in my weakness! And this reminds us of the law of the grain of wheat (John 12:24).

THE FOURTH AND FIFTH STEPS OF HUMILITY (7.35-48)

When speaking of the fourth and fifth indications of humility Cassian mentions obedience, patience, and perseverance. RM uses this in the fourth step of humility and adds as a fifth step that one is not to conceal anything from the superior (in Cassian this is the second indication); Benedict generally follows RM.

In my opinion these two steps are to be seen together. Just as the second and third steps belong together, which is evident in their similar structure (description of their content, culmination in a quote from Scripture, cf. later steps 6 and 7), so the fourth and fifth steps have a similar structure, namely, a mirror composition with a core sentence. While in the fourth step the evil is outside, the monk recognizes in the fifth step *my* evil, which is in the depth of his own heart.[110]

THE FOURTH STEP OF HUMILITY (7.34-43)

OVERVIEW

The fourth step is written in three columns. The first contains whatever happens to the monk, the second (middle) lists all the remarks regarding Sacred Scripture, and the third shows how the monk behaves in these situations.

110. Cf. Böckmann, "Benedictine Mysticism," 95f.

[35]The fourth step of humility is,		when in obedience
in hard and adverse circumstances		
and also in every injustice done to him		he silently and deliberately embraces patience,
		[36]and enduring, does not weary or leave.
	Scripture says,	"whoever endures to the end will be saved" (Matt 10:22);
		[37]also: "Be stouthearted and wait for the Lord" (Ps 26/27:14);
	[38]and showing that	the faithful must endure for the Lord
everything, even adverse things		
	it says in the person of the suffering:	
"For your sake we are slain all day long, are considered only as sheep to be slaughtered" (Ps 43/44:23; Rom 8:36)		
		[39]and confidently in the hope of divine reward they joyfully add: "in all these things we conquer through him who loved us" (Rom: 8:37).
	[40]And again in another passage Scripture says:	

"You tested us, O God, tried us as silver tried by fire; you led us into a snare, you bound us at the waist as captives" (Ps 65/66:10f.);		
	[41]and in order to show	
that we are to be under a superior	it continues saying:	
"you let captors set foot on our necks" (Ps 65/66:12).		
	[42]But fulfilling the command of the Lord	in patience
in adversities and injustice		
"When someone strikes you on one cheek,		turn the other to him as well;
if anyone takes away your tunic,		hand him over your cloak as well;
should anyone press you into service for one mile,		go with him for two miles" (Matt 5:39-41);
	[43]with the Apostle Paul	
false brothers		they bear
and persecution		they bear
and those who curse them (2 Cor 11:26; 1 Cor 4:12).		they will bless

In the fourth step of humility the monks encounter every kind of difficulty in communal life. The difficulties escalate toward the end: in the first part they are "hard and adverse things," and then in the second sentence "every injus-

tice"; in the second paragraph, "everything, even adversities." This part also describes what happens to the monks using words from Scripture, especially psalm verses: as sheep led to the slaughter, as in fire, led into a snare, having the captor's foot on their neck, having people over us. Finally in the third part (vv. 42ff.) there are "adversities and injustice," and in the words of Scripture the brothers feel as if being struck on the cheek, being robbed of their tunic, and being coerced to walk. Eventually, and this is the culmination, there seem to be false brothers, persecutions, cursing, and imprecations.

Within this entire step there is also a gradation with regard to the statements from Sacred Scripture. In the first part (vv. 35-36) Scripture is a counterpart that offers consolation; in the second part the brothers express their own experience through scriptural texts, or Scripture speaks in the person of the suffering; and in the third part (vv. 42-43) the scriptural instructions are carried out, and Scripture is, so to speak, incarnated. In this we could also see a process of *lectio divina*: *lectio*, *oratio*, *actio* (*incarnatio*).

In the first part the third column contains a quote from Matthew and one from a psalm. Both recall the spirituality of martyrs. In the second part we find the core sentence in verse 39: "they joyfully say, confident in the hope of divine reward: 'in all these things we conquer through him who loved us.'" *In* difficulties and not just afterward can we experience the love of Christ mysteriously, but also actually. This quote is from Romans 8:37; it is flanked by descriptions that are taken literally from Psalms 43/44 and 65/66 where the monk addresses God. In the third part both the situation and the monks' reaction are presented in scriptural quotes: twice there are three elements with each surpassing the other in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and the spirituality of St. Paul.

A short observation about the placing of this step in the entire Rule! This step contains nineteen words that occur only in this passage (*hapax*), a rather large number for just nine verses. In RM this step shows only ten *hapax*, and this means that ideas of the fourth step are repeated several times. It seems to me that this step mirrors more the spirituality of the Master than that of Benedict;[111] Benedict already described some of these elements in the fourth chapter of his Rule (4.30-33).

V. 35: The fourth step of humility is when, in obedience in hard and adverse circumstances, and also in every injustice done to him, he silently and deliberately embraces patience (*Quartus humilitatis gradus est si, in*

111. Of course, the large number of *hapax* is also connected to the images taken from the Bible, such as silver tried by fire, striking on the cheek, forcing someone to go a mile.

***ipsa oboedientia duris et contrariis rebus vel etiam quibuslibet inrogatis iniuriis, tacite conscientia patientiam amplectatur*)**

The introduction to this step is again—as in the entire chapter—an awkward simplification of the text of RM. Both rules here refer at the beginning once more to obedience (*ipsa oboedientia*). The situation consists of hard and adverse things; such hardships are not—as the course of Benedict's Rule shows—deliberately imposed by superiors to cut the individual monk down to size; rather, they arise out of living together in community. Prior and abbot may find themselves in conflict (*contraria*, cf. 65.8). Above all, monks are not to be opposed to what Sacred Scripture and the Rule say, or to what is proper for every Christian (2.13; 23.1; 39.8). In RM the word "adverse" also occurs in the sense that the monk is "told in advance about things contrary and repugnant to his will" (90.3). In this, however, Benedict does not follow the Master.

Yet injustice may be inflicted, and we might even translate: insults, offenses. We might be shocked that such things occur in a monastic community, but Benedict, as well as his predecessor, view this as very possible since they count on having all kinds of conceivable characters in their communities. The monastery is not described as a paradise of peace or as a foretaste of heaven; for it is rather a place of purification.

The monk embraces patience, and thereby he also embraces the painful aspects of community. This means a loving acceptance. The monk holds on to patience, which occurs a second time in this step where the brothers fulfill the Lord's command by bearing injustices in patience (7.42). The Latin word *patientia* implies that there is suffering, yet it is borne. We may recall the end of the Prologue, which says that "we share by patience in the sufferings of Christ (Prol.50).[112] In RM it is *constantia*, steadiness, that is embraced and, more precisely, the perseverance of patience. In RB, however, the text reads that "he silently and deliberately" embraces patience, which might be an indication of an internalization.[113] It seems to me that both rules deliberately avoid the word "silence" (*silentium*), which would rather indicate that the person does not speak. *Tacite*, quietly, goes deeper: the monk refrains even from inner talking and judging; his heart is at peace. He knows that this is the way of Christ. In his deepest heart he knows that he is loved by God.

In this first part the context of obedience is still evident (though more clearly in RM). But the attitude of the monk, inspired by Sacred Scripture, already points beyond obedience, just as the entire fourth step toward the

112. Cf. Borias, "St. Benedict, Master of Patience"; Casey, "The Virtue of Patience."
113. Cf. Kardong, "Deepest Conviction," 312.

end is no longer limited to the monk's relationship with the superior (except for v. 41).

With regard to the first verse we find an opposite attitude in a monk described by Sulpicius Severus: "he was unable to reject the temptation silently and deliberately."[114] In his conference about friendship Cassian writes that when a monk is offended, he guards the quiet in the depth of his heart and keeps silence, does not speak (*taciturnitas*).[115]

V. 36: and enduring, does not weary nor leave. Scripture says, "Whoever endures to the end will be saved"; (*et sustinens non lassescat vel discedat, dicente scriptura: "Qui perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit" [Matt 10:22];*)

Here we find for the first time the characteristic word for this step: *sustinere* (to endure; 7.36, 37, 38, 43; cf. also 4.33). Thus we might characterize the fourth step as enduring in difficulties. In RM the context of martyrdom is very evident, is even explicitly named—"and in the spirit of martyrdom they patiently endure" (RM 7.59). In the Rule of the Master difficult things are deliberately imposed so that the monks may, as it were, become martyrs. Thus the word "endure" occurs mainly in the context of obedience. In further texts of his Rule Benedict's main concern consists in making sure that the enduring will not be too difficult (35.14; 38.10). Though he does not deny the radical demands of following Christ, we might say that he has no interest in artificially creating a situation of martyrdom.[116]

The monk does not weary in endurance and does not leave. This can be interpreted in two ways: he does not evade obedience, and he does not leave monastic life. He does not escape but confronts difficulties and deals with them. In this undertaking the Lord gives him strength.

Sacred Scripture now provides proof for this. In speaking to his disciples Jesus encourages them to be courageous in testifying; he predicts that they will be hated by all, "but whoever endures to the end, will be saved" (Matt 10:22). In this context, suffering death is not excluded. Presumably Benedict understands the phrase "will be saved" (*salvus erit*) not as an escape from difficulties but as submitting and enduring them and thus mysteriously experiencing salvation.

The word "persevere" (*perseverare*) again points to Prol.50: "sharing by patience in the sufferings of Christ." Even though we have to suffer, we will

114. *Dial.* I.20.

115. *Conf.* XVI.26.2.

116. Cf. Kardong, 147–49, taking a middle road between Borias (who has no martyr terminology) and Holzherr 2016, 159 (who has a martyr's spirituality); cf. also Puzicha, 162f.

be saved by his death, which alludes to the salvation at the end of times. When we think of many stories of martyrs, we see how in all their tortures they were conscious that their final salvation was near. First Peter 2:20 says, "When you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God," and then points to the example of Christ in his suffering.

V. 37: also: "Be stouthearted and endure the Lord." (*item: "Confortetur cor tuum et sustine Dominum" [Ps 26/27:14].*)

The entire psalm verse reads: "Wait for the Lord, take courage; be stouthearted, and endure the Lord!" This again points to the future. This glorious future provides strength to act energetically and to let the heart be strong. The heart is being consoled, and the monk is to "endure the Lord." As we have seen already, the word "endure" is characteristic of this fourth step.

Previously, verse 35 says that the monk endures, yet here this is expressed more specifically: the monk endures the Lord. This also means that in the last depth the Lord stands behind everything, and it is our obligation to endure him in his love and in his submission to death, even though the individual does not really know what is a clear sign from the Lord. The monk may see his situation as a muddle, as darkness, even as a dark night, yet he does not give up his belief that behind everything there is the mysterious presence of the Lord whom he has to endure. Thus he will reach spiritual maturity, which is also assisted by stability that refuses to escape or to circumvent difficulties. Trust rests in God who writes straight on crooked lines.

V. 38: And showing that the faithful person must endure everything, even adversities, for the Lord, [Scripture] speaks out of the person of the suffering: "For your sake we are slain all the day long, considered only as sheep to be slaughtered." (*Et ostendens fidelem pro Domino universa etiam contraria sustinere debere, dicit ex persona sufferentium: "Propter te morte adficimur tota die, aestimati sumus ut oves occisionis" [Ps 43/44:23; Rom 8:36].*)

Now we begin the second part of this step. Scripture has a different function than previously as it speaks now out of the perspective (*ex*) of those who are suffering. This is stated very clearly in contrast to RM, Benedict's source, which has a different expression: "the prophet says for [*per*] the suffering."[117] In Benedict we find a deeper reading of Sacred Scripture that ultimately speaks out of our experience (*oratio*). What has happened here? The monk prays the psalms and recognizes himself in the words of this psalm. "Yes, this is how I feel, this is me." And saying this also contains some consolation. The monk is included in a long line of people praying the psalm who have had

117. The author uses the Latin text of RM 7.55; Eberle in his English translation says "the prophet says in the person of the suffering."

the same experience. The voice of the psalms is his own voice. In a similar way Jesus made the psalms his own; they speak out of him and for him.

The monk is now called "faithful" (*fidelis*),[118] as he has proven that he is reliable. We remember the word from Matthew 25:21: "Well done, my good and faithful servant [*Euge, serve bone et fidelis*]." The Lord was able to rely on him, even in difficult times. He endures everything, even adversities, that is, things that are contrary to his duties or skills, that do not suit him at all. Verse 35 already spoke of hard and adverse circumstances. Yet here we also find a small expression that acts as a sign: "*pro* Domino"—he endures all this for the Lord, for the sake of the Lord. Whatever happens to him happens because he wants to follow Christ. The monk is willing to endure (*sustinere*; v. 38).

The text here transitions to the plural, and the brothers are called "suffering" (*sufferentes*). Latin *sub-ferre* means to endure, bear, suffer! In the Vulgate this word is infrequent. The closest verse is 1 Corinthians 13:7: "love suffers all things, endures all things." In the same way Benedict inserted love into the third step. What he has in mind is not stoic endurance but proving one's love for God.

For your sake we are slain all the day long (*propter te morte adficimur tota die*). The Latin verb *adficere* means to add something, to cause, to befall, to afflict; here it is death that afflicts. Death is before our eyes and we cannot escape it, and this is true during the entire day. Ascetic life is seen as martyrdom. Perhaps we might describe this more precisely as the death of sensual pleasures, of power struggles, and of the craving for possessions of one's own. All this is endured "for your sake" (*proper te*). The monk might escape all this, but he stands firm because he holds fast to the Lord.

We are considered only as sheep to be slaughtered (*aestimati sumus sicut oves occisionis*). Just as the previous half verse, this one (Ps 43/44:23) is also quoted in Romans 8:36. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, even when things turn out very badly for us, or when we are, as it were, to be slaughtered. Even then our hope remains, the Christian attitude of defiance. The monk feels as if the situation cannot get worse, and he is allowed to express these feelings before God. In the background we might see Jesus Christ, the lamb "led to be slaughtered."

V. 39: And confidently, in the hope of the divine reward, they joyfully add: "In all these things we conquer through him who loved us." (*Et securi de spe retributionis divinae subsequuntur gaudentes et dicentes: "Sed in his omnibus superamus propter eum qui dilexit nos" [Rom 8:36].*)

In the second paragraph (vv. 38-41) a quote from the New Testament was inserted between the psalm verses. They are certain, confident (*se – cura*, i.e., without concern). In such a bad situation this is rather astounding. They can

118. *Fidelis* is a *hapax* just as *confortetur* in 7.37.

only have such an attitude on the basis of an eschatological hope since all our worldly "hopes" disappear. God will reward them and will grant life anew. Colossians 3:24 says: "you will receive from the Lord the due payment of the inheritance" (*a Domino accipietis retributionem hereditatis*). This passage deals with the work of the slaves for their master: there may be no worldly "reward," but the reward from the Lord will not be lacking. And the reward (retribution) is the inheritance that is certainly the Lord himself!

In assuming this perspective the monks are able to continue gladly or joyfully, add the quote from Romans 8:37. The word for joy (*gaudium*) occurs only twice in RB in the chapter about the observance of Lent, which speaks of a "spiritual joy" (49.6f.) The verb (*gaudere*) is used to describe the abbot, who can rejoice in the growth of a good flock (2.32), and then again here. Both texts allude to a supernatural reality.

In all this (*in his omnibus*). This expression could summarize all the adversities of this entire step. "We overcome" (*superamus*). This may remind some readers of the song used by Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.: "We will overcome." Yet the expression in RB is even stronger because it is used in the present tense. It is true: we overcome now, not only in the future. "Through" or because "of him" (*propter eum*): this or a similar expression occurs already for the third time in these three verses. Again Christ is the point where everything comes to a decision: the overcoming as well as the divine reward.

He who loved us (*dilexit nos*). Christ showed this very clearly in his willingness to go even to a bitter death, and his love for us remains. Nothing can separate us from it (see the biblical background in Rom 8:35-39). If this is the midpoint of the fourth step, then we can recognize here the anchor at which everything can be fastened. We may also interpret this in the sense that in all the negative experiences inflicted on us we may mysteriously, but really, experience the love of Christ. The fourth step shows us the response to the love of God, and of Christ; it is concretization of RB 4.1: "to love God with your whole heart, your whole soul and all your strength."

V. 40: And again in another passage of Scripture:[119] **"You tested us, O God, tried us as silver tried by fire. You led us into a snare; you placed tribulations on our backs." (*Et item alio loco scriptura: "Probasti nos, Deus, igne nos examinasti sicut igne examinatur argentum; induxisti nos in laqueum; posuisti tribulationes in dorso nostro" [Ps 65/66:10-11].*)**

Again the one who is suffering recognizes him- or herself in the verses of the psalm and in them is able to express him- or herself to God.

119. Both authors are very aware that the following psalm verse is found in a different place. They do simply use individual verses here and there without connection to their context, an observation we can make repeatedly.

You tested us, God. Sufferings, and here being tested, are traced back to God, as the psalms, and the Old Testament, usually do. We may think of similar psalm verses: "You have tested my heart, searched it in the night" (Ps 16/17:3). "Lord, you have searched me, you know me" (Ps 138/139:1). Before God everything is open, visible.

You tried us as silver tried by fire.[120] Fire burns everything that is not useful, lets it sink down. The purified silver or gold remains above, separated from any dirt. In the same way purification is achieved in human beings. The valuable elements pass through, and the dirty, sinful ones are thrown away. Then, as Hilary says, human beings are able to shine brightly.[121]

You led us into a snare. This is a situation where persons cannot free themselves; they need a liberator. Again we find the word that is uncomfortable for us: "*you* have led us" (*induxisti nos*). God as the cause of everything! Yet quite often it is we who get ourselves into the snare. We may think of situations that, in our view, are so muddled that we see no way out. This may be our own fault, or the fault of others. In reading this entire psalm the reference is presumably the passion of Christ who suffered because of us, and some Fathers interpret the "snare" as the prison where the martyrs suffered.[122] And so the monk can lament but also knows that "by patience he shares in the sufferings of Christ" (Prol.50). And eventually he will be able to confess: "Our soul is like a bird in the fowler's snare; the snare was broken and we escaped" (Ps 123/124:7).

You placed tribulations on our backs (Ps 65:10-11). In what might the tribulations (*tribulations*) concretely consist? *Tribulus* or *tribolos* is a thorny weed, and from there it can mean torture, hardship, misfortune. We can also connect it with the image of threshing wheat. And all this is placed on our shoulders or our backs. It might be a difficult and thorny command, a hard task, but also generally a difficult situation, e.g., when brothers prove to be nasty. Yet in all these difficulties we are told: You [God] did it, or for today, you let it happen. Ultimately everything is in your hands.

V. 41: And to show that we must be under a superior, [Scripture] continues: "You have placed people over our heads." (*Et ut ostendat sub priore debere nos esse, subsequitur dicens: "Imposuisti homines super capita nostra" [Ps 65:12].*)

Of all things God placed human being over our "head," that is, we are affected in our most sensitive place. The head is the image for our self-

120. In RB *examinare* occurs only in this verse; RM mentions a similar passage almost verbatim in the chapter on receiving brothers.

121. *In Ps.* 65.10 (no. 20); also PsRufinus, *In Ps.* 65.10.

122. Hilary, *In Ps.* 65.11 (no. 21); PsRufinus, *In Ps.* 65.11-12.

consciousness, our convictions, our intelligence, and our desires.[123] The Master had already used the text of Psalm 65/66:10-12 in his chapter on obedience and used the Latin word *maior* for the superior explaining that the disciples "are to have over them as God's representative a superior whom they fear in the monastery" (7.64). Benedict replaced it with the word *prior*, which, for him, designates a superior or even older confreres (in contrast to *iunior*, the younger ones). The psalm text spoke of "human beings" (plural) who are placed above our heads. When using this text some Fathers refer to Christ who was judged by Pilate.[124]

Rather than thinking of the spirituality of martyrs we could think of the everyday life of most of Benedict's contemporaries. It is similar today. How many people are placed, e.g., over an unskilled laborer, a refugee, or someone seeking asylum? Compare this with those who are placed over us in religious communities! When a monk feels as if placed in a fire or in a snare, it is certainly painful because it affects us directly, but in comparison with the injustices in the world it ought not to be glorified too quickly, but perhaps rather seen as solidarity, a sympathetic participation in global suffering. Why should we be spared this? It goes without saying that our participation in Christ's passion is not denied. In all this we may remember Romans 5:3-4: "affliction produces endurance, endurance proven character, and proven character hope."

Yet the situation becomes more serious in the third part. Two sequences of three elements each describe the trying situation and the reaction to it that signals surpassing it.

V. 42: And moreover, in patience fulfilling the Lord's command in adversities and injustices, "when stricken on the one cheek, they also turn the other; to the one who takes away their tunic, they also hand over their cloak; pressed into going one mile, they go two." (*Sed et praeceptum Domini in adversis et iniuriis per patieniam adimplentes, qui "percussi in maxillam praebent et aliam, auferenti tunicam dimittunt et pallium, angariati miliario vadunt duo" [Matt 5:39-41],*)

As already indicated, the third part goes a step further. Sacred Scripture not only provides us with direction. The task of reading Scripture does not simply consist in expressing ourselves with words from the Bible; rather, we must put its words into action (*lectio*, *ratio*, *actio*).

123. Cf. Neugschwandtner, *Demut*, 67.

124. Cassiodorus, *In Ps.* 65.12; also PsRufinus, *In Ps.* 65.11-12: We are even to respect the sinners who are placed over us and in doing so remember that we are sinners ourselves. In this way it is easier to tolerate them.

The "command of the Lord" here practically means the Sermon on the Mount that proves its worth especially in "adversities and injustices." *Iniuria* can also be translated by insults. Patience is mentioned for the second time in this step (as it is at the beginning). The first time it is "embraced"; now it becomes the means to fulfill the Sermon on the Mount. In this certainly the idea appears that without patience no command of the Sermon on the Mount can be fulfilled. The gospel text says: "But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles" (Matt 5:39-41).

Then three examples follow that we surely must not generalize. If we would want to fulfill them on the superficial level, they might even be harmful. Rather, the examples are models of action that, on the one hand, indicate the radical nature of following Christ, and, on the other, point to the direction toward which we are to make some—perhaps small—steps. The "literary genre" of a model of action in my opinion corresponds best to the meaning of this text; these instructions are expressed very concretely, but what is at stake here is the quality, and especially the radical nature, of our actions. We are not to copy the model but rather to translate it into another corresponding form. In doing so imaginatively,[125] we take the words very seriously and see them as an inner strength that is to express love. These commands cannot be fulfilled in a mechanical manner, yet we also are not to push them aside easily because they are so radical.[126]

To turn the other cheek; not only let go of the tunic, but also add the cloak; pressed into one mile, go a second one with someone—all of these actions are surpassing what was done to me, though on a different level. The first action involved patience and nonviolence. It is said that already in animals this results in the fact that the attacking animal cannot strike (bite-block). To give me more and to go further than the action to which I am compelled—this can be practiced in small steps in every community.

We can imaginatively describe a concrete situation where our tunic is taken away, or where we are compelled to go a mile: What would we do? How might we, in the love of Christ, set a small sign outdoing the evil action? Here we do not deal with taking away something because we are absentminded, or not returning something because we forgot, but rather

125. Cf. C. H. Dodd, *Morale de l'Evangile* (Paris, 1958), 88–93.

126. To give literally one's coat to a person who takes away the tunic was not to be done in Benedict's community since RB 33.2 states that nothing is to be given or accepted without permission.

with intentional actions. Striking someone on the cheek might happen concretely in slaps, for instance, when singing the liturgy. To be compelled to go one mile might consist in excessive demands from fellow community members or superiors.

V. 43: With the Apostle Paul they endure false brothers and persecution and will bless those who curse them. (*cum Paulo apostolo falsos fratres sustinent et persecutionem sustinent et maledicentes se benedicent [2 Cor 11:26; 1 Cor 4:12].*)

When Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians lists all his dangers and difficulties, he ends with that of false brothers.[127] Patristic works also often point to false brothers with reference to Paul. They may be more difficult to bear than persecution from outside because they are in the church and undermine her unity. In his letter to the Galatians Paul also speaks of false brothers who have wormed their way into the community, undermine the freedom in Christ trying to enslave people again.[128] The point here is the slavery of circumcision with all its customs. For Paul this is essential and thus he uses strong words to fight against them.

When RM and RB use such words, we may presume that similar things have happened, that brothers in the community undermine its freedom and its unity in Christ. In this step responding to such situations consists not in confronting them but rather in enduring them. Perhaps the false brothers are not ready for an open discussion. Semeraro thinks that through patience the evil in others is revealed and so could be healed.[129] Again nonviolence is advised. This is probably connected with the confidence that the Lord himself will bring an end to such falsity.

They endure persecution.[130] In accepting this reading, the biblical background becomes clearer by using 1 Corinthians 4:12: "When ridiculed [*maledicimur*], we bless; when persecuted, we endure." In Latin the verb *sustinere* is used, which could be seen as the key word for this step. Does the persecution come from the false brothers? It can be presumed. Thus the

127. It is the eighth point of what is described as "dangers." Besides on land and the sea, in cities and solitude, there are general dangers coming from pagans and finally from false brothers.

128. Gal 2:4: "but because of the false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, that they might enslave us."

129. "Umiltà" (2008), 154.

130. This remark is not found in all manuscripts, yet Hanslik, 52, provides a long list of manuscripts that contain it. I decide for the more difficult reading since it is relatively easy to explain why this remark was omitted (*sustinent* appears twice, persecution in the monastery?). Vogüé also has incorporated it in his edition (SC 181, 484).

monks are asked to show the same perseverance as martyrs. Certainly we cannot always deny that the "persecutors" may have a good intention, yet people may also become persecutors out of fanaticism, pharisaic attitudes, and pedantic use of norms.

They will bless those who curse them.[131] Certainly this is not a matter of petty slanders, for in the sixth century monks would have believed in the power of cursing. Even we sense the consequences all the way into our body when we are cursed. What are we to do so that the negative waves do not destroy us? It seems to me that the Bible offers us help: forgiving and blessing. A blessing contains everything good that comes from God and thus also the grace of conversion for the one who curses. I see a blessing as enclosing us, so to speak, like a wall so that the projectiles of evil cannot harm us. In connection with spiritual warfare PsBasil uses the expression "be surrounded by Christ" (*sis Christi circumdatus*),[132] yet the same certainly can also be said about blessing in this struggle. Blessing brings us closer to Christ and allows us to grow into him. In addition, there is our belief that in Christ we are blessed with rich blessings (Eph 1:3). This is our protection, and thus hatred cannot harm us.

THE FIFTH STEP OF HUMILITY (7.44-48)

Coming from the fourth step we might think that the community is really very sinful and unjust and in part even consists of evil persons. We might be in danger of pointing to all the weaknesses in the community (and this is also true for the church). The individual might see him- or herself as a victim of the evil surrounding him or her. Therefore it is good that the fifth step follows the fourth, for here the monks says: "*my* trespass, *my* injustices, the evil of *my* heart."

We can write this step in columns, which results in a circular construction.

	[44]The fifth step of humility is when he
does not hide all the evil thoughts that come into his heart, and the evil he secretly committed	
	[and professes them]

131. Ambrose, *De office* II.7.35; Peter Chrysologus, *s.* 38.2.
132. *Adm.* 1.

	in a humble confession before his abbot.	
	[45]Scripture admonishes us to do so when it says:	
	"Make known your way	to the Lord
	and hope	in him" (Ps 36/37:5).
	[46]It also says:	
	"Confess	to the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endures forever" (Ps 105/106:1; 117/118:1).
	[47]And so also the prophet:	
"My sin I declared to you		
and my injustices	I did not hide.	
	[48]I said: I will declare against me	
my injustices		to the Lord, and you pardoned
the evil of my heart" (Ps 31/32:5).		

The first column contains the dark sides in me, such as evil thoughts, evil, sin, and injustice. And they are accepted as "my" sin. The text begins in the third-person singular and ends with the first person (in consonance with the psalm quotations).

The second column states what we do and don't do with these dark sides: not hiding them, not covering them up, but rather making them known, confessing and declaring them. Hiding and covering up might be the first reaction, but it is all openly admitted. And toward the center of the step we also read "hope in him."

The third column shows that all comes from Sacred Scripture, and more precisely from the psalms.

The fourth column is dedicated to the divine partner and sheds light on the situation. It is the Lord to whom we make known our way (vv. 45, 48). And in the center Scripture says: "He [the Lord] is good, and his mercy endures for forever."

This step corresponds to Cassian's second indication of humility: "If someone conceals from his elder not only none of his deeds but also none of his thoughts."[133] Besides the already mentioned differences, RB barely deviates in this step from RM. Both stand in the classical tradition of disclosing one's heart, which focuses not just on sins but also—as is still evident in RB—on thoughts and one's way (which is not always evil, cf. also RB 49.8). In his first conference on discretion Cassian comes back to this point again by saying that the first indication of humility consists in entrusting all our thoughts to the judgment of an elder.[134] In his *Rule for Nuns* Caesarius says that the snares and the advice of the devil may cause a wound in the heart.[135] Casey calls this step "radical self-honesty."[136]

V. 44: The fifth step of humility is when, in a humble confession to his abbot, [the monk] does not hide all his evil thoughts that come to his heart nor all the evil that he secretly committed. (*Quintus humilitatis gradus est si omnes cogitationes malas cordi suo advenientes vel mala a se absconse commissa per humilem confessionem abbatem non celaverit suum.*)

The radical nature of this first sentence may surprise us inasmuch as in such a confession *all* evil thoughts are mentioned that come to the heart, that is, they only come and are recognized, but the text does not yet say that they were accepted. This indicates that here we do not deal with confessing sins but rather with disclosing the heart. Generally disclosure of the heart is mentioned in the context of struggling with evil! In uncovering the thoughts they lose their power. Only then does the text mention that the secretly committed evil acts are also confessed. Benedict takes this up again later when he says in 46.5-6: "If this concerns a sin that is hidden in the soul, [the

133. *Inst*. IV.39.2; Cassian speaks of an "elder" (*senior*).

134. *Conf.* II.10.1; here too he speaks of elders (*seniors*); as background to this it is helpful to read *Conf.* II.11-13. Regarding the disclosure of the heart, cf. also Semeraro, "Umiltà" (2009), 24–34; Santantoni, "La confessione."

135. *RegVg* 24.5; also Augustine *Praec* IV.8; Basil, *Reg* 200, where the person to whom one confesses is called a doctor. We are to open ourselves only to someone who can also heal.

136. *Truthful Living*, chap. 8, 167–86.

monk] is to confess it only to the abbot or the spiritual elders who know how to heal their own wounds and those of others without exposing them and making them public." RM 15 has a long chapter describing how deans question monks about their thoughts and about how the various thoughts can be healed (RM 15.12-56). As long as the thoughts are still small, they are to be quashed, an admonition found also in Prol.28 (and RM).

The evil that is secretly committed in the heart may correspond to what the Master says about monks being on a journey (15.48-52), yet for Benedict there are also other areas where the brother is not seen and thus can act in an evil manner. We may think of the eight vices in Cassian (*Inst.* V–XII). In disclosing their thoughts and deeds human beings confront their own depth.

Anything evil is not hidden, concealed, or disguised, as our instincts would usually suggest, but are confessed to the abbot in a humble confession. The monk recognizes his earthy nature and, with it, his sinfulness, and he accepts this reality.[137] The power of such disclosure has a purifying and healing effect. The importance of such non-concealment is perhaps most evident in the context of sexual misconduct. With regard to confession before the abbot we also think of later additions where RB mentions the elders (RB 46; 27; 4.50; cf. below).

Three scriptural quotes follow that practically explain everything that is important. Sacred Scripture speaks and admonishes. Here there are three psalm verses in which the psalmist is again called "prophet." The spiritual growth is described in the words of psalms.

V. 45: Scripture admonishes us do to this when it says: "Reveal your way to the Lord and hope in him." (*Hortans nos de hac re scriptura dicens: "Revela ad Dominum viam tuam et spera in eum" [Ps 36/37:5].*)

Immediately following this quote Psalm 36/37 says *et ipse faciet* ("and he will act"), which presumably means he will forgive. Jerome asks the question[138] why we ought to reveal this to God since he knows it. Yet what is at stake here is the fact that we reveal what is in our heart and always hope in God who forgives our sins. This is the meaning of "hope in him."

When we look at the Latin text, we see that it does not mention the confession of sins but the way (*via*) that we reveal. Both good and evil are part of this way, though RM and RB seem to focus especially on the negative side. Origen exclaims: "Oh, what salutary commands . . . not to love evil, [but]

137. RM 10.61 says *per humilem linguae confessionem*, that is, "a humble vocal confession." What tried to come to our heart is now freed by the tongue; cf. also Böckmann, "Benedictine Mysticism," 95f.

138. PsJerome, *In Ps.* 36.5; similarly also Cassiodorus, *In Ps*. 36.5.

to hope in God and to find joy in him!"[139] According to the Latin text of RB 7.45 we could say that it describes a whole, undivided presence before our merciful God. In saying out loud what is hidden in us and in the absolving word of the abbot/elder—who is to possess discretion—healing, clarification, and liberation occur.[140] The monk does not want to fool himself or others but rather wants live in reality and learn to accept it. There is first his own human reality but also that of the Lord as the next verse says.

V. 46: And [Scripture] also says: "Confess to the Lord for he is good and whose mercy endures forever." (*Et item dicit: "Confitemini Domino quoniam bonus, quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius" [Ps 105/106:1; 117/118:1].*)

In comparison to RM Benedict changed only one letter, but in doing so he pointed out something very important: RM's *bonum est* ("for it is good") becomes *bonus est* ("for *he* is good"), thus presenting God as *the* one who is good.[141] In the midst of confessing one's own faults there is the good Lord whose mercy lasts forever. One abyss calls to the other. This entire step speaks of the Lord (*Dominus*), yet I assume that we are right when we interpret this as Christ the Lord before whom this confession occurs. The focus is on the positive here in the middle quote but also in the first and the last one: to hope in him, his mercy is forever and at the end "you have forgiven."

This is, at it were, a counterpart to the Jesus Prayer: "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner," and to RB 4.74, "never despair of God's mercy." And 7.46 also contains the reason for this attitude: his mercy endures forever. This mercy is truly experienced. When we reflect on whether Benedict might not put too much emphasis on human sinfulness, we can say that it is only the negative counterpart to God's mercy. The abyss of sin calls out for the abyss of God's mercy that is immeasurable. And when I live with this attitude, I lose the desire to point the finger to all that is evil in my environment.

Vv. 47-48: And so also the prophet: "Then I declared my sin to you; my injustices I did not hide. I said, I confess my injustices to the Lord and you took away the guilt of my sin." (*Et item propheta: "Delictum meum cognitum tibi feci et iniustitias meas non operui." Dixi: "Pronuntiabo adversum me iniustitias meas Domino, et tu remisisti impietatem cordis mei" [Ps 32:5].*)

139. Origen, *In Ps.* 36.5.

140. Cf. Puzicha, 164–66; Holzherr 2016, 162f, and the entire tradition of disclosing the heart; also Dreuille, *Rule of Saint Benedict*, 169.

141. With this Benedict refers to the Roman Psalter (PsRom), which has "he is good" in both Pss 105/106:1 and 117/118:1.

The dark side of human beings is described with various words: sin, injustices (2x), evil (*impietas* literally means disloyalty). Nothing is concealed but rather honestly confessed to the Lord; thus *he* can forgive the evil of my heart. In explaining this verse Jerome alludes to the merciful father in Luke 15. Everything that the younger son did is forgiven by his father's mercy.[142] Augustine calls attention to the fact that the psalm literally says "I will confess against myself" and not against the Lord.[143] The emphasis again is on not concealing or hiding one's evil. The last sentence is encouraging since it speaks of forgiveness (*remittere*) and so points to a new beginning. God throws our sins behind him and does not always enumerate all our faults anew. This is a gift!

The fifth step of humility does not describe what today we would call confession. Such individual confession before a spiritual person was not yet officially recognized (cf., e.g., the correctional code in RB). Yet this process is presented both in the Eastern and the Western church as a necessary element in monastic communities.[144] At the same time its result is presented as reconciliation or forgiveness of sins.[145] It is proper to Benedict to have "spiritual elders" (*seniors spirituals*) besides the abbot.

How shall we deal with such verses today? What is essential in disclosure of the heart today has mostly become part of the wider area of spiritual direction. Of course, the charism of a particular Benedictine community is also important. It seems to me that in spiritual direction this fifth step can be literally translated, whether or not it is connected with confession. Yet it is important that the director have experience, or at least some knowledge of Benedictine communal life. There is little doubt that in verbalizing mistakes and sins and in receiving encouragement forgiving actually occurs. It is, however, another question whether such an exchange is a sacrament strictly speaking. What is at stake in this area—today as always—is humility, authenticity, acknowledgment of our own *humus*, which contains good elements as well as weakness and mistakes. And with Cassian we will consider carefully whom we would ask to accompany us spiritually.[146] Cassian describes a young monk who was not understood by his elder and who, luckily, found

142. *In Ps.* 31.5.

143. *In Ps.* 31.I.5 and *In Ps.* 31.II.16 he says: when we conceal our own merit and give voice to our own sins, then the Lord can again renew our strengths.

144. With regard to the context of monastic or church confession, see Jákó Őrs Fehérváry, *Multi sunt poenitentiae fructus*: *Pénitence monastique aux V^e^–VI^e^ siècles dans le paysage de la pénitence ecclésiale*, Studia Anselmiana 147 (Rome, 2009), 166–76.

145. Cassian, *Conf.* XX.6.1; XX.8.3.

146. Puzicha, 165.

Abbot Apollos, who kept him from leaving monastic life.[147] The abbot of a community is elected, and spiritual direction is not always that person's best talent as the community expects from him so many different qualities and skills; here the principle of subsidiarity certainly comes into play.[148] It is important to have a guide, a companion to whom in faith and honesty we can entrust not only our mistakes but also our thoughts and our dark and our positive depths and who is able to provide us with advice, guidance, comfort, and correction.

SIXTH AND SEVENTH STEPS OF HUMILITY (7.49-54)

The structure of these two steps is similar to the one in the second and third steps as well as in the ninth to the eleventh. First, there is a description of what human beings do; then the step culminates in one to three quotes from Scripture. A comparison with the second and third steps shows that here "he [the monk] says with the prophet" is followed by psalm quotes while in the second and third steps a passage from the New Testament ends the step. Of the monk the texts say he imitates the Lord or the voice of the Lord; it is common to all four steps that the singular is used.[149]

These two steps correspond to the seventh and eighth indications of humility in Cassian, "if he is satisfied with utter simplicity and, as being an unfit laborer, considers himself unworthy of every task given to him; eighth, if he does not declare with his lips alone that he is inferior to everyone else but believes it in the depths of his heart."[150]

In verse 49 Benedict begins to call the individual person a "monk"; in doing so he also replaces RM's word *discipulus* in the following text. When we read the two steps in RM the contrast stands out even more clearly between RM's beginning "the disciple mounts the rung . . ." and that which follows. Is it really a result of human effort? Can we do this ourselves? Could this not pervert the entire spiritual life?

147. *Conf.* II.13.4-9; *VitPat* V.5.4.

148. Casey, *Truthful Living*, 177f.

149. In the fourth and fifth steps we see both singular and plural.

150. Characteristic words in *Inst.* IV.39.2 are *omni vilitate contentus . . . ad omnia se quae sibi praebentur velut operarium malum iudicarit indignum . . . semet ipsum cunctis inferiorem . . . intimo cordis credit affectu.*

THE SIXTH STEP OF HUMILITY

This step is characterized by four radical expressions: one is content with *everything*, considers oneself as an unfit laborer in *everything*, who, at the end, has "become *nothing*" and is "*always* with you."

V. 49: The sixth step of humility is when the monk is content with the lowest and meanest things and considers himself as a bad and unworthy laborer in every task imposed on him, (*Sextus humilitatis gradus est si omni vilitate vel extremitate contentus sit monachus, et ad omnia quae sibi iniunguntur velut operarium malum se iudicet et indignum,*)

RM and RB correspond to each other (with the above-mentioned changes), and the verb *praebentur* (it is given to him) of RM 10.66 is changed into *subiunguntur* (it is imposed on him). This changes the perspective. The Master may have thought of a situation in which the monk is content with everything that is low and considers himself as a bad laborer in everything that is given to him. Benedict's text first emphasizes contentment with things, yet considering himself as an unfit laborer in the context of tasks is more logical. With this Benedict also follows Cassian in *Inst.* IV.39.2.

In both Rules we hear an echo of Luke 17:10: "When you have done all you have been commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable slaves'" (*servi inutiles sumus*). Yet both authors also go a step further inasmuch as they designate the laborer not just as unprofitable but as unfit. Perhaps the situation in the fifth step is still present. In RB *malus* is actually used in the sense of "evil." Thus the monk here must say that he has not only done too little (only that which he was commanded in Luke) but also done it badly and is not even worthy to be a servant. Even in the last verse of RB 7 the monk is called "laborer" (*operarius*, 7.70). Apparently his receptivity here also contains a new activity. Perhaps the sixth step indirectly admonishes against laxity. When might we ever be able to say that we completed a task fully and entirely? When did we ever adequately answer the call of grace? If we are honest we have to say again and again that we always lag behind.

Here the text further says that the monk is content (*contentus*).[151] Hebrews 13:5-6 can provide an explanation: "let your life be free from avarice; be content with what you have, for God has said, 'I will never forsake or abandon you.' Thus we may say with confidence: 'The Lord is my helper.'" It is important to be content with what we have and not claim more. This principle is valid not only with regard to things but also with regard to God! If everything is grace, I can live and surrender my life in gratefulness.

151. Latin *contentus* derives from the verb *contineo*, "to restrict oneself."

In this step we encounter a hermeneutical problem that becomes even more acute in the following one. How can we truthfully judge in this manner? Do we imagine that a candidate who recently entered the monastery would utter such words? Would we not rather conclude that he may have a psychological illness and may need treatment? Is it not necessary that we first recognize our own abilities and what is done well in the task that we are trying to fulfill?

Here I would like to take up a proposal of Anselm Grün.[152] In the first phase of the spiritual life it is necessary to have a spirituality of ideals for which we strive and reach out. Slowly, slowly we will recognize that reaching them is not the goal. Recognition of powerlessness, inability, experience of our vulnerability, and sinfulness—all this leads us to being lowered into our own *humus.* In this sense I would like to describe these two steps as signs of grace, signs of how God leads us into our own earthiness. The monk now gauges the distance between him and God on the basis of a deeper experience of God. We might even speak of mystical experiences, as their other side is an honest expression of these two steps.

V. 50: saying with the prophet: "I am reduced to nothing and cannot understand; I am like a beast of burden in your presence; and yet I am always with you." (*dicens sibi cum propheta: "Ad nihilum redactus sum et nescivi; ut iumentum factus sum apud te et ego semper tecum" [Ps 72/73:22-23].*)

The scriptural quote the monk makes his own is significant—"I am reduced to nothing"—as it indicates an abyss and, further, "I am a beast of burden before you." In the Vulgate a beast of burden (*iumentum*) is a very useful animal that carries and pulls burdens, yet it does not push itself into the foreground.[153] The Latin text says more precisely: *et nescivi*, and do not understand anything, or I am without insight. Semeraro points out that it is hard to test when we have difficulties and do not understand. We are able to tolerate much when we know the reason, yet not understanding we walk in darkness.[154]

And I am always with you (*ego semper tecum*) indicates the other abyss. The experience of our own nothingness (yet being loved by God) calls for the experience of God who loves "all." The last word is "always with you" (*tecum*), a very consoling word that signifies our unity with God and Christ. In the sense of the customary christological interpretation of the psalms I

152. Cf. introduction to RB 7, p. 128.

153. When beginning his office, Benedict XVI spoke of the bear in his coat of arms and of his life in which, inspired by this psalm quote, he carries his burdens.

154. Semeraro, "Umiltà" (2008), 62; (2009), 102.

think that we are not deviating from the spirituality of RB when we point to Christ who said "I am with you" (*cum vobis*), and this can also be said by the human person: "I am with you" (*cum te*). It may be significant that we have here an intensification from "before you" to "with you" (*apud te*, *tecum*). PsRufinus describes such a soul as blessed: she endures everything and always remains with God and nothing can separate her from him (see Rom 8:32-35).[155]

The effect of having experienced God is modesty and contentment so that in daily life we no longer make demands but rather are grateful for all that is given as gift.

This step indicates both the chasm between us and God and our unity with him. Unfit and unworthy laborer, nothing, a beast of burden—always with you. These are very radical expressions: nothing—and therefore content with everything and seeing ourselves as unworthy servant. Yet in everything: always with you. In the parallel step Saint Bernard describes the contrary situation, that is, that the monk complains that the superiors do not pay attention to his talents and that his tasks are below his dignity. He cannot admit any fault.[156]

THE SEVENTH STEP OF HUMILITY

V. 51: The seventh step of humility is when the monk does not only declare with his mouth that he is lower and more insignificant than all the others but even believes this in the depth of his heart. (*Septimus humilitatis gradus est si omnibus se inferiorem et viliorem non solum sua lingua pronuntiet, sed etiam intimo cordis credit affectu,*)

The seventh step of humility presents an intensification in two directions: first, that this experience reaches even the inmost part (*affectus*) of the heart and, second, that the monk describes himself as less worthy than all the others. We may react to this too by shaking our heads. Is this not dishonesty? Again this seems possible only in the context of a deep experience of God that contains, at the same time, an experience of our inmost self. It is a sign of grace that found its way into the inmost part of the human heart! We may also call it the reverse side of a mystical experience. In the spirituality of ancient monasticism it does not occur infrequently that a monk describes himself as the last sinner. The Jesus Prayer also strengthens our awareness of our sinfulness. We always—and ever more so—need God's mercy.

155. *In Ps.* 72.23.
156. *Steps* XVI.44.

For this the monastic tradition offers a large number of examples. The following sayings may serve as examples. "Consider yourself as the least of all creatures, that is, even lower than anyone among sinful men. Whoever considers himself as someone, while in reality he is nothing, deceives himself. Also do not judge your neighbor, despise no one, but rather bemoan your own sins."[157] And Matoès says: "The more a human being approaches God, the more he sees himself as a sinner." And also: "Perfection is when someone considers his neighbor as higher than himself."[158]

The expression referring to the inmost conviction of the heart (*intimo cordis . . . affectu*) probably comes from Cassian. The experiential path reaches the deepest heart. Cassian also speaks of "the most heartfelt disposition" (*affect intimo cordis*).[159]

The monk humbles himself; we could also translate: he accepts in his heart his situation just as it is, vulnerable and sinful. We can think of Paul, who describes himself as the very least of all and admonishes us that we are to distinguish ourselves from others through humility, that is, judging the other as higher than ourselves (Phil 2:3-5).[160] The biblical text also shows clearly that this is a presupposition for the love that seeks to do what is useful for another (RB 72.7). Paul knows that everything he is comes from the grace of God (1 Cor 15:10; Prol.31). The monk may sense that others have surpassed him in sanctity, virtue, patience. Why not? Despite this, he will be content with what he is and live in gratefulness. He does not set himself up as the norm but respects everyone else.

He is not divided in himself; rather, what he says with his mouth (as in the fifth and sixth steps) exactly corresponds to what he feels inside (cf. RB 19.7). Semeraro mentions that a monk perhaps may say that he wants the last place, but woe if he is given the penultimate one![161]

Then three psalm quotes follow. In the first one, from Psalm 21/22:7, the monk speaks, as the second quote shows, with the psalm to the Lord, probably Christ.[162]

157. *VitPat* VII.43.2; also *RegMac* 3; *VitPat* III.206; Basil, *Reg* 62, which also refers to Matt 11:29. Dreuille also refers to the traditions of Zen and of the Sufis that describe similar mystical experiences; cf. *Rule* 171.

158. *Alph*, Matoes 2; 7.

159. *Conf.* XXIV.16; *Inst* XII.32.1, "the deepest reaches of our heart." Cf. Kardong, "Deepest Conviction."

160. Cf. Puzicha, 168; 1 Cor 15:8f.; Eph 3:8; 1 Tim 1:14-16.

161. Semeraro, "Umiltà" (2009), 104.

162. Cf. Fischer, *Die Psalmen*, 49f.

V. 52: He humbles himself and says with the prophet: "But I am a worm and not a human being, scorned by everyone, despised by the people." (*humilians se et dicens cum propheta: "Ego autem sum vermis et non homo, opprobrium hominum et abiectio plebis" [Ps 21/22:7].*)

We might say that the monk is now truly rooted in the earth and prays this psalm, which is usually seen as a christological expression. If someone says this too early it could very well be an expression of masochism. This presupposes that a person is something, sees himself as worthy, a wonderful creation: "I praise you, so wonderfully you made me" (Ps 138/139:14). Yet bit by bit God guides our path into our heart. It seems to me that we must not rush anything. Yet when a spiritually mature person says this, it may be true. The "nothing" of the sixth step is intensified here to worm, scorn, contempt (*vermis*, *obprobrium*, *abiectio*). Here depths open up. Naturally Christ's passion also opens, Christ who made himself into nothing and became like a worm (Phil 2:7-8).[163] Not all the patristic interpretations see this verse as humiliation: Jerome points out that the Bible also says, "Fear not, O worm Jakob" (Isa 41:14), and Augustine refers to the God-man who as a worm is mortal, but born without intercourse, and thus the psalm verse can say "not a human being" but "worm."[164]

Scorned by people (*obprobrium hominum*). People smile, mock him, even deride him. This certainly refers to the passion, during which Jesus was slandered. For the monk it becomes a grace that he is able to associate so deeply with Christ. People's contempt (*abiectio plebis*)! The crowd thinks they can make it without him, throw him away, as it were, disregard him.

V. 53: "I exalted myself and was humiliated and put to shame." ("*Exaltatus sum et humiliatus et confusus" [Ps 87/88:16].)

In the mouth of Jesus this psalm quote, however, is not easily comprehensible: "I rose up, was humiliated and put to shame."[165] Human persons see this situation as a result of their own elevation, perhaps we might call it self-reliance. External situations, their own experiences, are instrumental in leading us humans to our own truth. All our ambitious ideas come to naught (*confundere*). In the seventh step the monk becomes reconciled with his

163. For the interpretation of this psalm, cf. Reemts, *Schriftauslegung*.

164. *In Ps.* 21.II.7-8; PsRufinus, *In Ps.* 21.7; Cassiodorus, *In Ps.* 21.7 also points to Christ's virgin birth and to Christ's silence and his humility. Christ is not human, not a sinner. He also points to 1 Cor 1:27, "God chose the weak in the world in order to shame the strong."

165. PsRom: *Egens sum ego et in laboribus a iuventute mea; exaltatus autem humiliatus sum et confusus.*

failures. Sometimes a person can be healed only by suffering a moral defeat and by falling into sin (e.g., the conversion of Paul).[166] Such a monk will no longer judge others.

V. 54: And again: "It was good that you humiliated me so that I may learn your commandments." (*Et item: "Bonum mihi quod humiliasti me, ut discam mandata tua" [Ps 118/119:71, 73].*)

The last psalm quote is from Psalm 118/119:71-73. Patristic psalm commentaries often emphasize that learning the commandments also implies putting them into practice.[167]

It is good, Lord, that you humiliated me. This is almost a prayer to Christ, to whom the psalms are directed. Benedict omits this remark, perhaps in order not to have Christ twice (in *dominus* and *mandata*). This psalm says several times that the Lord humiliated the speaker. *Bonum mihi*—actually it was good for me as it enabled me to grow in faith and love.

The purpose was that I was to learn your commandments. Of course we may ask: Which ones? Perhaps the commandment of trusting, of expecting everything from God. Yet when the interpretation of the psalm is directed to Christ we may also think of the living commandment, the person of Christ, the culmination of all commandments. He himself shows us the commandments, the testimonies, the law. From him we can learn everything we have to do. Thus we might translate: that I learn your person, Christ.[168]

The two steps of humility thus end with the perspective on "with / near you, with you, your commandments, your person." They pull human persons out of their exaggerated self-concern and toward transcendence: "Throw yourself into the abyss of God, of the Lord, look to him!" And this will help us to find the right standards.

Bernard of Clairvaux called the parallel steps "presumption" and "arrogance" (*praesumptio*, *arrogantia*). A person is convinced to be holier than all others and attributes this solely to himself and his merits.[169]

These two steps must also be interpreted with a view to RB 72. If they do not lead us to love, they are useless. The heart probably has to go through these humbling experiences in order to be expanded (Prol.49), to become a dwelling for God. Such people will anticipate others in showing respect, will

166. Grün, *Spiritualität von unten*, 43.

167. Cf. Hilary, *In Ps.* Thet [Hebrew number], 118.71; Augustine, *In Ps.* 118; *s.* 17.9; Cassiodorus, *In Ps.* 118.71.

168. Cf. the title of A. Böckmann's book *Apprendre le Christ* (2002). This title was inspired by this psalm verse. Cf. also Harl, 127–30.

169. *Steps* XV.43-44.

endure their weaknesses with utmost patience, will compete in obedience, do what is useful for their neighbor, and be devoted to each other in selfless love.

Today we see the experiences described in the sixth and seventh steps also as an expression of solidarity with all the people who are enslaved, humiliated, and downtrodden.

THE EIGHTH STEP OF HUMILITY

V. 55: The eighth step of humility is that a monk does only what the common rule of the monastery and the example of the elders encourages. (*Octavus humilitatis gradus est si nihil agat monachus, nisi quod communis monasterii regula vel maiorum cohortantur exempla.*)

This eighth step does not follow the model of the previous ones because it is the only one without a scriptural quote. The step in RM is different, for the Master uses two Scripture quotes from the Old Testament: one referring to the law, "Your law is my meditation" (Ps 118/119:77; a literal translation of *Lex tua meditatio mea est*), and the other referring to the *maiores*, "Ask your father and he will inform you, ask your elders [seniors] and they will tell you" (Deut 32:7). The Master connects this quote with the abbot and his teaching (*per suam doctrinam abbas*; RM 10.74). This fits into the Master's theology of school and his understanding of disciple (*discipulus*) who is now ascending this step on the ladder to heaven. Schütz sees the lack of scriptural quotes in Benedict's text as a sign that Benedict makes his statement based on his own experience.[170]

Both authors borrow the thought from Cassian who, in the sixth indication of humility, says that a monk follows the common rule or the example of the elders.[171] The Master and Benedict clarify in their texts by saying "the common rule of the monastery," while Cassian used a term with broader meaning that, among other things, included the common rule of cenobitic communities.[172]

In this step the word "common" is set off against the particularities of individual monks. Benedict's Rule is basically common to all community members. It doesn't allow a leveling off downward since it challenges the monks always to advance in their zeal (RB 73) in such a way that the strong find what they need and the weak are not frightened away (RB 64.19). We can learn from every member of the community.

The example of the elders (*maiorum exampla*) are also not a call to mediocrity. There are, for instance, the examples of monastic history. We have

170. Neugschandtner, *Demut*, 98.

171. *Inst* IV.39.2; Guevin, on discretion in "Beginning and End," 200.

172. Vogüé, *Community and Abbot*, 219–21.

a large throng of elders who have preceded us, and each one of us has the possibility to choose this or that person as a model in consonance with our own charism given to us by God. In this point Benedict is further advanced than RM, which just speaks of the teaching of the abbot. This step in RM is reminiscent of the definition of the cenobites in RM 1.2: "those who live in monasteries and serve under a rule and an abbot."[173] Holzherr states: "Fidelity to the proven form of life . . . does not exclude meaningful developments that are commensurate with the times."[174]

The eighth step could be summarized as ability for communal life. In Bernard's steps of pride, which are the reverse image of Benedict's steps, we see the exact opposite. The fifth step of pride is when someone is full of self-admiration, always wanting to be extraordinary, better than the others and thus proving that he is not like the rest of the others. When they eat, he will fast; when they sleep, he will go to pray, and especially when he knows that others observe him. When someone in the community is paler, he is confused and begins to feel his limbs to convince himself that he is still more ascetic than the others.[175]

"Such exaggerated zeal may . . . cause a monk to become proud and may be a danger for the community. All our striving always includes the danger to seek more ourselves than God."[176] Daily life in a community requires more than diligent following of the written rules. Here in the eighth step the monk sacrifices his desire to know everything better. I remember some sisters who were so well integrated into the community that their sanctity did not become visible to the community until after their death. Among the "elders" I also count all the members who lived an exemplary life before us and whom we would like to emulate, each of us in our own proper way.

This step challenges us to give ourselves fully to the community with all its members, its traditions, and its limitations.[177]

To me it seems contrived to point in this context to the twelve-year-old Jesus.[178] Still we may remember that Jesus subordinated himself to the law (Gal 4:4) and to his parents (Luke 2:50), as long as this was part of God's will for him. But to me this seems to play only a secondary role here. Beginning with the eighth step our authors describe concrete behaviors that do not have to harmonize with a phase in Jesus' earthly life.

173. Cf. Puzicha, *Quellen*, 136–37; Cassian *Inst.* XII.30 and II.10.2.

174. Holzherr 2016, 166.

175. *Steps* XIV.42.

176. Neugschwandtner, *Demut*, 99, also 102; Heufelder, *Weg*, 106; Schindele, "Stufen," 229.

177. Cf. Semeraro, "Umiltà" (2009), 163, 168; Casey, *Truthful Living*, 206.

178. So does Neugschwandtner, *Demut*, 98.

The eighth step represents, as it were, the "turning point" in RB 7. From now on, beginning with the eighth step, the emphasis is on concretizations of humility. We cannot go (or be led) any deeper than is the case in the seventh step. What matters now is translating the teaching into everyday life.

This is also visible in the structure of the steps. The second and third steps are built toward a climax, the fourth and fifth steps are circular structures, the sixth and seventh again go to a climax, yet the eighth step is totally different. Thus after this step we find three steps regarding silence, laughter, and good speech, each of them ending with a Scripture quote (or with what was thought to be one).

THE NINTH TO ELEVENTH STEPS (7.56-61)

The ninth, tenth, and eleventh steps again form a unit expressing the restraint with regard to being silent, laughing, and speaking. As the other steps they begin by naming their content and culminate in scriptural quotes that are introduced by "as Scriptures shows," "because," or "as it is written." In this way they have a structure similar to the one of the second and third steps (obedience) and the sixth and seventh steps (humility proper). In this sense as well as with regard to their concrete content, we again see the trilogy: obedience, humility, silence.

Here Benedict copied RM almost verbatim, with the exception of his usual changes in the introductory sentences to each step. The Scripture quotes come from wisdom literature: Proverbs, Sirach, and a wisdom psalm. The last "word of Scripture" is actually from a maxim of Sextus that is, however, inspired by wisdom literature. In the tenth step Benedict omits a Scripture quote of RM (see below).

First we will present the three steps written in columns:

[56]The ninth step of humility is when	a monk	restrains his tongue from speaking	remains silent
		and does not speak	until he is asked,
[57]for Scripture shows that		"where words are many, sin is not wanting" (Prov 10:19).	

[58]And	"a talkative person	has no direction on earth" (Ps 139/140:10).	
[59]The tenth step of humility is when	a monk	is not easily and quickly ready to laugh,	
for it is written	"A fool	raises his voice in laughter" (Sir 21:20).	
[60]The eleventh step of humility is when	a monk,		when speaking, speaks mildly and
		without laughter,	speaking humbly and with gravity, saying few and reasonable words,
		and does not raise his voice,	
[61]as is written:	"The wise man		is recognized in his few words" (Sextus, *Sent* 145).

The first column shows the importance of the references to Scripture. The second column mentions the monk who may become a talker or a fool, but also maybe a wise man. What he is not to do is mentioned in the third column: not to speak without being asked, not to speak much, not to laugh easily and quickly, and certainly not to be ready to roar with laughter or raise his voice. On the right side we have the virtues that are expected: keeping silent; speaking quietly, humbly, with dignity, and with few and reasonable words. This positive side is here more detailed than in RB 6. The use of wisdom literature (including a wisdom psalm) also corresponds to RB 6.

THE NINTH STEP OF HUMILITY

V. 56: The ninth step of humility is when a monk restrains his tongue from speaking, remains silent, and does not speak until he is asked, (*Nonus*

***humilitatis gradus est si linguam ad loquendum prohibeat monachus et, taciturnitatem habens, usque ad interrogationem non loquatur,*)**

The closest parallel to this text is, besides RM, a saying from the *Vitae Patrum*: "A brother asked the elder: 'For how long do we have to keep silent [*silentium*]?' The elder answered 'Until you are asked. In each place if you keep silence [*taciturnus*], you will have rest.'"[179] Interesting in this saying is the fact that the words *silentium* and *taciturnus* are used, yet *taciturnus* is associated with rest (*requies*). When a question is asked, one may speak, yet even while doing so the inner quiet (*taciturnitas*), the peace of the heart, is kept.

In the ninth step we read that the tongue is restrained and silence is kept, that is, we do not speak until there is a necessity to do so. In my opinion this is a relevant attitude, for how often are questions answered that are not even mentioned. With regard to this step Schindele speaks about renouncing all egotistical desire to intervene in the concerns of others, as, for instance, when trying to outstrip another or to procure advantages for oneself. Instead, it is important to accept in peace what God provides and trusting to allow ourselves to be led by his will.[180] A question may be asked of us explicitly, but it may also be unspoken. Might Benedict have thought of Basil, who wants that words "build up" and that by keeping silence we learn to speak usefully at the right time?[181]

V. 57: for Scripture shows that "where words are many, sin is not wanting," (*monstrante Scriptura quia "in multiloquio non effugitur peccatum" [Prov 10:19],*)

Proverbs 10:19 describes the one who restrains his lips as "very prudent" (*prudentissimus*). In RB talkativeness/loquacity (*multiloquium*) is always seen as negative, as was already made clear in RB 6. This is speech that is not relevant, but thoughtless, where there is little care. The same is true for prayer (RB 20.3).

Jesus admonishes us to avoid loquacity when we pray and not to think that we would be heard because of our many words (Matt 6:7). Augustine points out that loquacity—which is also defined as superfluous speaking (*superflua*

179. *VitPat* VII.32.3. Cassian's ninth indication of humility reads: "If he holds his tongue and is not loud-mouthed" (*Inst.* IV.39.2).

180. Schindele, "Stufen," 231.

181. *Reg* 136.4f.: "No bad word is to proceed from your mouth, unless it is good for the building up of the faith (Eph 4). Thus keeping silence is necessary until it teaches us to speak usefully at the right time."

locutio)—may be a substitute for a real purification of the heart.[182] In a vivid image Ambrose says that the many words come out of us, and sin enters us.[183]

V. 58: and "a talkative person has no direction earth." (*et quia "vir linguosus non dirigitur super terram" [Ps 139/140:10].*)

The second Scripture quote is found in Psalm 139/140:12.[184] We all desire that our path has a clear direction while the many words pull us here and there. What is meant here is an inner clarity that then also leads to right kind of speech (cf. also eleventh step). It is interesting to note that the church fathers also accuse the talker of the psalm of lying, referring to James 1:19, which says that everyone is to be quick to hear but slow to speak; those who do not pay attention to this cannot be "led." "May you find joy in listening to talk about God, . . . speak only out of necessity. The one who leads you is inside."[185] Not having "any direction" (*dirigitur*) is seen as the opposite of being compliant, obedient to God.

In the parallel step of pride Bernard has loquacity and boasting (*iactantia*).[186] Self-love fills the monk who is no longer able to control the superficial jokes and has an absolute need to find ways and means to express his feelings. Bernard has him say: "My heart is like wine . . . it will burst if I don't talk and find relief." He hungers and thirsts for listeners so that he can show himself and be admired. In every conversation and every discussion he is the speaker. He does not wait until he is asked to speak but interrupts the one who is speaking. He offers questions and solutions to all the problems without even having been consulted. He himself provides the question and gives the answer. When the conversation has to be ended, he complains about not having been given enough time to speak even though he spoke for a long time. His goal is to be well known and liked and to show his wisdom. He has something to say about every single point. Here words are not used for the benefit of another but simply for self-presentation. Even in spiritual matters people may boast about having had visions and dreams, about fasting, nightly vigils, and prayer.

182. Augustine, *Contr Cresc* I.1.2; also *s. Dom mont* II.3.12.

183. Ambrose, *De Cain* I.9.36; also *De off* I.5.14.

184. RB's reference, Ps 139/140:10, refers to the Roman Psalter (PsRom): *vir linguosus non dirigetur super terram, virum iniustum mala capient in interitu.* In modern translations the verse is Ps 140:12.

185. Augustine, *In Ps.* 139.15 (v. 12).

186. *Steps* XIII.41; the translation is my own based on the author's; the English translation speaks of the "stomach."

Bernard's illustration clarifies the message of the ninth step: on the one hand, respect and regard of the other person, intuitive understanding of the other; and, on the other hand, recollection, keeping silent (*taciturnitas*) from where the good and constructive word can emanate. The negative side also shows that in such loquacity sin is never far. The word that emanates from listening to a question (be it implicit or explicit) has a direction—it helps the other person, is useful (RB 72.7). The monk has no need to be admired by others, for he is anchored in God. The warning against useless speaking is still relevant today. Those who have walked their paths in prayer will not tend to talk much. On the other hand, many words can be a hindrance to deeper prayer. Casey points out that being unfaithful to silence can be harmful to our prayer and may even include a rejection of God's grace.[187]

THE TENTH STEP OF HUMILITY

V. 59: The tenth step of humility is when a monk is not easily and quickly ready to laugh, for it is written, "A fool raises his voice in laughter." (*Decimus humilitatis gradus est si non sit facilis ac promptus in risu, quia scriptum est: "Stultus in risu exaltat vocem suam" [Sir 21:20].*)

The tenth step is rather foreign for us. But perhaps we may think of robust and young monks in Mediterranean countries who had somewhat rough manners (in the sixth century) and remember that this laughter presumably was caused by sexual jokes and aggressions (cf. RB 6). An investigation also showed that especially explosive laughter and tendentious jokes can substitute for satisfying forbidden sexual impulses unhindered by any feeling of shame. Furthermore, we need to distinguish uncontrolled frolicking and the joy of a quiet disposition. "Laughter destroys the holy."[188] In addition, this step does not prohibit hilarity, which is recommended elsewhere (5.16), or joy (RB 49.6-7); instead, what is at stake here is the quick explosion in laughter, the roaring laughter that signifies lack of self-constraint.

In addition to the scriptural quote referenced in the text there are other sources, i.e., Sirach 21:20: "A fool raises his voice in laughter, but a prudent man at the most smiles gently."[189] But above all we may remember Basil: "To indulge in uncontrolled and unrestrained laughter is a sign of immoderation." The soul is not ruled by reason; yet hilarity and cheerfulness are laudable.[190]

187. *Truthful Living*, 218f.
188. Cf. Geisel, "Verbot," 33.
189. Vulg: *Fatuus in risu exaltat vocem suam; vir autem sapiens vix tacite ridebit.*
190. *Reg* 8.26-28, also *Adm.*, line 11-12.

Whenever Scripture mentions laughter in a positive sense, it is—according to Basil—a hilarity that arises from the soul.

The Master added yet another scriptural quote that Basil uses in a similar way: "Like the crackling of thorns under a cauldron is the laughter of a man" (RM 10.79; Eccl 7:7 [7:6 in modern trans.]). We need to notice that these quotes do not simply speak against laughter altogether, but only against uncontrolled laughter that goes hand in hand with incontinence and aggression. Once again, restraint in laughing is a virtue of wisdom, for the "fool" (the opposite of a wise person) raises his voice in laughter.

In the parallel step of pride Bernard speaks of a silly, "foolish merriment"(*inepta laetitia*) in which a monk seeks only what is fun and avoids everything that is harder, diverting his attention from all suffering and concentrating only on what is easy. Such a monk wants to blow his own trumpet in a desire to appear always joyful, joking, and overly cheerful.[191]

With such behavior human beings want to appear superior and so destroy human relationships.[192] Whoever thoughtlessly laughs about anything usually considers him- or herself as the absolute arbiter, taking seriously only him- or herself while ridiculing everyone and everything else. Such scoffing laughter tends to be unkind, hurts fellow human beings, and, in the worst case, may even deny them their dignity.[193] The tenth step of humility critically scrutinizes the modern society that looks only for fun and entertainment.

With all this Benedict does not say anything against humor, which is connected with true humility. This is also evident in the derivations from the root word *humus: humilitas*, *humanitas*, humor. Anyone who is able to accept his or her earthy nature, even including his or her pitiful condition, is free to laugh at him- or herself, and also easily accepts it when others humorously laugh at him or her, thus contributing to a truly lighthearted atmosphere. Here sin is neither denied nor covered up; instead, the awareness of one's own weakness and the trust in God's compassionate mercy help such persons not to take themselves too seriously.

THE ELEVENTH STEP OF HUMILITY

Vv. 60-61: The eleventh step of humility is when a monk, when speaking, speaks mildly and without laughter, speaking humbly and with gravity, saying few and reasonable words, and does not raise his voice, as is written: "The wise man is recognized in his few words." (*Undecimus humilitatis gradus*

191. *Steps* XII.40.
192. Neugschwandtner, *Demut*, 112.
193. Schindele, "Stufen," 233.

***est si, cum loquatur monachus, leniter et sine risu, humiliter cum gravitate vel pauca verba et rationabilia loquatur, et non sit clamosus in voce, sicut scriptum est: "Sapiens verbis innotescit paucis" [Sextus,* Sent *145].*)**

With their emphasis on restraining the tongue and laughter, the ninth and tenth steps are the precondition for speaking well that is now described in the eleventh step. Generally Benedict follows the text of RM, yet with one significant change (cf. below).

The last scriptural quote is related to Scripture but actually is found in the *Sentences* of Sextus, a handbook that contains a collection of many wisdom sayings from Christian and other contemporary literature.[194] This is one of the two places where Benedict introduces an apocryphal saying with "Scripture" or "it is written" (here and in 7.33). The Master did this in a great many places, but by the time Benedict was writing his Rule a part of the so-called *Decree of Gelasius* had appeared.[195] It is evident that Benedict is someone who was very much concerned with orthodoxy and, among other things, was intent on avoiding apocryphal writings. Presumably he overlooked these two quotes because he copied the entire passages from RM and also because these quotes fit rather easily into the biblical context.

It may be interesting to note that correct speech is identified by seven qualities. Benedict has a good sense for such numerical symbolism. There are three binomial expressions followed by a last quality.

Mildly and without laughter, humbly and with gravity. *Leniter* means gentle, mild, moderate, not hasty, but calm. Often this word is combined with tender, delicate, attentive, sweet, friendly, peaceful, and all this is also connected with *taciturnitas*, keeping silence. The root of the word is *lana*, "wool." It has a good feel, just like pure wool. This word is rare in the Latin Bible. After Jacob's death Joseph addresses his brothers in a gentle, mild, and consoling manner (Gen 50:21).[196] The letter to the Galatians says that we ought to teach others who were caught in some transgression in a "gentle manner" (*spiritu lenitatis*) and fully aware of our own weakness (Gal 6:1).

Without laughter. This summarizes once again the tenth step. Benedict does not want any superficial talk.

194. In the fourth century Rufinus translated this work into Latin. The context is *Sent* 143–45: *Sapientis mens semper apud Deum est. Sapientis mentem Deus inhabita. Sapiens paucis verbis innotescit* ("A wise mind is always with God. God inhabits the mind of the wise man. The wise man is noted by his few words").

195. Gelasius I was pope from 492 to 496. Already before being elected pope he had written many ecclesiastical documents. He published a catalogue of authentic writings of the Fathers together with a list of apocryphal works (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

196. Vulg: *consolatus est eos, et blande et leniter est locutus.*

Humbly and with gravity. The first word might summarize the ninth step. The monk does not place himself in the center, for someone else is present on whom he focuses and whom he perhaps wants to help.

The word gravity—*gravitas*—reminds us of a scale: this word is weighty, and the scales descend. These are significant words born out of inner silence and recollection that can provide true help for someone. Such words matured in the heart. The monk is "taciturn"; we can rely on his words. On the opposite side we have the superficial and thoughtless words (in Latin *vana*; empty, void). Such words are like air or, as Qohelet says, vanity. Or they may be *fabulae,* idle tales and gossip that Benedict criticized severely (cf. RB 6.8). In the consecration of virgins we find a prayer for "grave gentleness" (*gravis lenitas*).[197]

Benedict generally emphasizes *gravitas* in his Rule. This might be connected to his birthplace, but in my opinion it is more probably a trait of Roman culture.[198] The brothers are to anticipate each other in "gravity" when going to the Vigil (22.6), and going to the work of God during the day is to be marked by *gravitas* (43.2). If after Compline someone needs to speak it is to be done with "utmost gravity and respectful moderation" (*summa gravitate et moderatio honestissima*; 42.11). In the same way the service of the reader is performed with humility and "gravity" (47.4).[199]

The monk is to speak "few and reasonable words" (*pauca verba et rationabilia*). Few words are sufficient when they are saturated with meaning, when they are born out of silence (*taciturnitate*). The other person then also knows that each word is important and will accept them more easily with full attention. How difficult it is to listen well to someone who uses a flood of words!

Here Benedict changed the word *sancta* in RM to *rationabilia.* This may seem to be a small change, yet it manifests a basic attitude that Benedict shows throughout his Rule. Apparently he recoils from using "holy words," and this is something that we can easily understand.

The two adjectives "reasonable" and "humble" are characteristic for Benedict. When someone from outside expresses a criticism that is "reasonable and with the humility of love" (*rationabiliter cum humilitate*), the abbot is to consider prudently if perhaps the Lord sent this person for this very reason (61.4). And in the context of appointing a prior, which can lead to bad

197. Cf. "Gravitas," *RAC*, 773, as found in the *Sacr Veron* 1104: *sapiens benignitas, gravis lenitas, casta libertas*: in "Praefatio at Virgines sacras."

198. In comparison with Fracheboud, cf. Fontaine, "La romanité de S. Benoît"; art. "Gravitas," *RAC*, 753–71; Casey, *Truthful Living*, 232.

199. *cum humilitate et gravitate et tremore fiat.*

consequences such as "envy, quarrels, slander, jealousy, discord, and disorder" (65.7), the community nevertheless asks "reasonably and with humility" to be given a prior. Then the abbot together with the council is to appoint a God-fearing brother (65.14). An unreasonable demand is to be rejected by the cellarer "reasonably and humbly" (31.7). First, a demand must be reasonable, be based on sound reasons. If something, however, is expressed only humbly, it is not yet necessarily good. In my opinion it is characteristic for RB that three times "reasonably" precedes the expression "with humility." In this sense it is also characteristic for Benedict that in the eleventh step the monk does not say few and "holy words" (as in RM) but rather "few and reasonable words" (7.60). It is interesting to note that the word "reasonable" occurs only three times in the Vulgate. As comparison to our text we might refer to Job 32:3, where Job's three friends do not find a "reasonable answer" (*responsionem rationabilem*) for his difficult situation and his lamentations.

Benedict himself is such a reasonable, proven, and wise man. He always has a firm contact with reality, or, we might say, with the *humus*; he is anchored in the earth, uses his common sense, and requires the same from his monks. Continuing this thought we might say that in the monastery everything is first of all to be reasonable. This is the human foundation on which Christian and monastic values can be built.

Not raising his voice (*non sit clamosus in voce*).[200] This qualification of speaking we might call the consequence of the preceding qualities of speaking. The monk does not raise his voice because he speaks in a quiet tone (quietly and without laughter), because he has gained the maturity of not needing to place himself in the foreground by using a loud voice, and because his words themselves are weighty (speaking "humbly and with gravity"), because he says only reasonable things, and thus does not need to use a loud voice to compensate for the emptiness of what he says.

V. 61: as is written: "The wise man is recognized in his few words." (*sicut scriptum est: "Sapiens verbis innotescit paucis" [Sextus,* Sent *145].*)

The quote from Sextus speaks of the wise man;[201] his opposite is the monk who laughs loudly: "The foolish man explodes in booming laughter." What is at stake here is a path from foolishness to wisdom. We might call this spiritual maturity, unity in oneself, coming to peace with oneself and before God, and all this will result in peace and gentleness toward fellow human beings.

200. Cf. Neugschwandtner, *Demut*, 119.

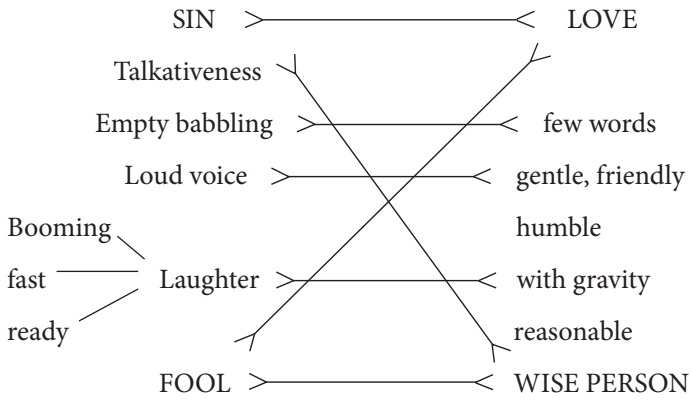
201. Sextus 143–45: *Sapientis mens semper apud Deum est. Sapientis mentem Deum inhabitat. Sapiens paucis verbis innotescit.* Regarding loud speech, cf. Cyprian, *Ad Demetr* 1–2.

We might ask whether the authors of both rules here deliberately chose the word "wise" (*sapiens*). In the first step of humility we read that one needs to keep the fear of God always before one's eyes; now at the end the wise person is recognized by few words. May we interpret this in the sense that this describes how the fear of God matures into wisdom? In the epilogue, the monk attains love, yet right before the last step wisdom is mentioned.

We may think of some offices that, according to RB, require both fear of God and wisdom in those who hold them, for example, the cellarer (31), the guest brother (53.21-22), and the porter (66.14). Using the image of RB 7, we might say that they have passed through a spiritual maturing process and wisdom is its ripe fruit. Wisdom also prepares human beings to receive the gift of love.

Bernard called the corresponding step "light-mindedness," or, more literally, "superficiality of the mind." The monk is puffed up by pride, feels superior to the others. His words reflect at one time his pleasure regarding his superiority, at another his pain when seeing that other monks appear good.[202]

A semiotic chart may serve as a summary of steps 9–11:



Silence and restraint of laughter prepare the soil for good words; these are few and a contrast to empty babbling. On the left side, we see the steps leading to sin; on the right side, those leading to love (cf. epilogue to RB 7, below). A fool babbles; the wise person utters few words. A fool is loud; a wise person gentle. The wise person speaks humbly, the fool with laughter that is fast, booming, and loud. The fool is always quick to laugh while the wise person utters reasonable words. The fool's laughter is not good and will not lead to love.

202. *Steps* XI.39.

In other texts talkativeness is called idle talk, babbling, or gossip that is invented. Qohelet calls it a "whiff of air." On the other hand, a good word should be not only holy but weighty, filled with good sense, meaning, and usefulness for others. And Benedict seems to think that this occurs more easily when words have matured in silence and come from a peaceful heart (*taciturnitas*).

THE TWELFTH STEP OF HUMILITY (7.62-66)

The twelfth step is reminiscent of the first one. God is present everywhere. The words "always" and "everywhere" are repeated often. Humility permeates the entire person, and this is the effect of an inner attitude and is not intended for beginners. Again we remember the fifth, sixth, and seventh steps. There the great and merciful Lord is on the one side; on the other the sinful human being is described as nothingness, emptiness. And this reminds us of the Jesus Prayer that consists of the same two poles, and there is a reference to the publican in the gospel, as is done very often in monastic literature. For the ancient monastics the publican's prayer is the model of the Jesus Prayer. This attitude cannot be "made"; rather, it is the gift of grace and requires a deep experience of God as well as the experience of one's own weakness.

We can write this step again as a circular structure:

A Introduction 62-63a
  B Attitude 63b-64
    a) the monk always bows his head
    b) feels guilt because of his sins
    c) thinks of the last judgment
      C he repeats the prayer of the publican 65a
  B' Attitude 65b
    a) with downcast eyes
    b) "I am a sinner"
    c) not worthy to look up to heaven
A' Conclusion 66

V. 62: The twelfth step of humility is when the monk is humble not only in his heart, but always shows humility in the entire attitude of his body to all who see him. (*Duodecimus humilitatis gradus est si non solum corde monachus sed etiam ipso corpore humilitatem videntibus se semper indicet,*)

The seventh step had led into the innermost heart. Coming from there now humility characterizes the entire human being in his exterior attitude

as well. Even others perceive it. Therefore the monk now serves as an example for the community and the monastic environment. And soon others will realize whether this attitude is an inner reality or is just affected. In the introduction to the seventh chapter the body and the soul are described as the two sides of the ladder (7.9); in the same way this text describes both sides.

V. 63: That is: at the *opus Dei*, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on a journey, in the field, wherever he is sitting, walking, or standing, he is to have his head always bowed and his eyes downcast. (*id est in opere Dei, in oratorio, in monasterio, in horto, in via, in agro vel ubicumque sedens, ambulans vel stans, inclinato sit semper capite, defixis in terram aspectibus,*)

Six places are mentioned, three times two. The first two are the *opus Dei* and the oratory; then the monastery with its garden (inside the enclosure); then when a monk is outside on a journey or working in a field. The *opus Dei* is not a place but the one element of monastic life to which nothing is to be preferred (43.3), and ordinarily it takes place in the oratory. Neither Benedict nor the Master intend a logical list of individual places, yet both intend to be as complete as possible. In order to round out the description they add three verbs—to sit, walk, or stand—that in fact encompass the entire day and the monastic activities. Such a monk is also not harmed when he is outside the enclosure, for he is at one with himself and his behavior "outside" is no different than in the monastery.

The bowed head also reminds us of Christ's death on the cross (many church fathers comment on the expression *inclinato capite*). A theology of the cross is certainly appropriate here (as it is in the chapter on obedience). In the resurrection the Father will lift up his son's head. The text also mentions that the monk lowers his eyes. We may ask why the authors of both rules in this expression practically say the same as with the bowed head. "To cast down" or "lower" is, however, only a weak translation. The Latin expression means that one is fixed on the earth, is rooting oneself in the earth. From there we came, and to there we will return. In addition, we can remember the root for the word humility—*humus*, earth. Being anchored in the earth!

V. 64: Because of his sins he judges himself guilty at every hour and thinks that he may already be called before the terrible judgment, (*reum se omni hora de peccatis suis aestimans iam se tremendo iudicio representari aestimet,*)

The word *aestimare* is used twice; it means to estimate, acknowledge, judge; one acknowledges oneself as guilty and called into court. To acknowledge guilt at any time is probably the motivation for the downcast eyes, perhaps also the bowed head. This awareness of being guilty never leaves the monk. The judgment is *tremendum*, terrible. God sees into our innermost

hearts; nothing can endure before God. There are many reasons for us being accused, even when we try our best. Yet we may also remember that Christ "made amends" for our sins so that we can be acquitted. A monk who, in the twelfth step, judges himself to be guilty can do this in truth only after having truly experienced God in his purity and holiness; and I think also when he believes Christ to be at the right hand of God as our advocate. We certainly must complement the twelfth step with the biblical idea of God.

V. 65: always saying in his heart the words of the publican in the Gospel who said with his eyes downcast, "Lord, I am a sinner and not worthy to lift my eyes to heaven." (*dicens sibi in corde semper illud quod publicanus ille evangelicus fixis in terram oculis dixit: "Domine, non sum dignus, ego peccator, levare oculos meos ad caelos" [Luke 18:13]*.)

Always saying in his heart. This expression is customarily used together with the Jesus Prayer.[203] First we say it with our lips, then it slowly sinks into our heart, and from there it may pray itself independently, as it were. The same expression was also used in the first step of humility (7.18); yet here, at the end of the chapter, its content is aligned more closely with the Jesus Prayer. And the word "always" points to unceasing prayer.

From the text of RM Benedict omits the fact that the publican stood before the temple (10.88) and only says "the publican in the Gospel." Might Benedict have thought that this publican did not stand outside but already in the temple? He is already *in* the sanctuary. Thus Origen says: "Look at the publican who, in the Gospel, went into the temple, stood in the back, and did not dare to lift his eyes to heaven."[204]

Benedict repeats that the eyes are cast down to the earth. Origen said: "He lowered his eyes down to the earth, not only his bodily eyes, but also the eyes of his soul."[205] This goes hand in hand with the expression "I am not worthy to lift my eyes to heaven." This is a combination of the quote from Matthew 8:8, "Lord, I am not worthy," and Luke 18:13, which says that the publican "did not dare to raise his eyes to heaven." The text of both rules corresponds—although not verbatim—to the meaning of the gospel. Manasse says in his prayer, "My sins are numerous; I am not worthy to look up to the heights of heaven because of the large number of my sins."[206]

203. Cf. Quartiroli, 88. Cf. also Basil, *Reg* 86.2: monks are to live always fully in the presence of God.

204. *In Ps.* 37.2 (in the translation of Rufinus): *Intuere illum publicum qui in evangelio ingressus in templum et de longe stans nec audens levare oculos suos in caelum.*

205. Ibid.

206. *Oratio Manasse*, 9. The prayer of Manasse is an apocryphal text of the Jewish Old Testament (2 Chr 33:19); it appears in sixteenth-century editions of the Vulgate.

Verse 65 no longer says, "I have sins, my sins" (as in the fifth step), but rather, "I am a sinner" (*ego peccator*). In my opinion, this expression goes a step deeper and again is reminiscent of the Jesus Prayer, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." The experience of God and of ourselves make such an expression possible. Nothing that is good can come from human beings alone, and the monk fully surrenders himself to God's mercy. I remember a story of a Russian staretz who was asked if he had seen any sinners. He responded with no, but he said that he had seen only one sinner, himself.

V. 66: And with the prophet he says, "I am bowed down and humbled in every way." (*Et item cum propheta: "Incurvatus sum et humiliatus sum usquequaque" [Ps 37/38:7, 9; 118/119:107].*)

At the end both rules choose a psalm quote that, by using the word *humiliatus*, forms an inclusion with the beginning of the chapter. In addition the quote also connects with the allusion to the parable of the publican in the very first verse of RB 7. In his explanation of Psalm 37/38 Cassiodor emphasizes that the human person is totally humbled.[207] Augustine says that anyone who is as bent as the woman in Luke 13:11 is unable to stand up straight by his or her own power.[208] This is certainly also true for the monk who is bowed down, bent, close to the earth, the *humus*, but this also means that the monk is totally dependent on God's mercy. Does this not create a deep solidarity with all the bent down, depressed, and crushed people of the world?

How are we to understand such instructions today, and how are we to put them into practice? It seems to me that this step especially is an action model for our everyday life. On the twelfth step the monk is a model in which we can see the radical nature of spiritual progress; in this monk we can also see a model for the relationship between human beings who are both sinful and anchored in the earth and their God, a model that shows us a direction for our own actions and for our taking perhaps just small steps toward our goal. Yet we cannot simply translate into practice his step superficially and word for word.

Bernard calls the corresponding step of pride "curiosity." This corresponds to the eyes that look to the right and the left.[209] For Benedict the eyes are directed upward (to God, the judgment) and downward to the place where we as human beings are rooted. From there all curiosity, all comparisons,

207. *In Ps.* 37.9. Ambrose, however, chooses the reading of the psalm that says "until the end" (*usque ad finem*) and points to Christ who is the end, the goal of the law (*In Ps.* 37.32). Cf. also the quote from Origen in n. 204.

208. *In Ps.* 37.10 (= v. 7).

209. *Steps* X.28.

and all judgments will disappear. Thus a monk, a monastic, is immune to the great danger of pharisaism because he or she sees him- or herself as a sinner in body and soul standing before God.

EPILOGUE (7.67-70)

The rungs of the ladder lead not upward but downward. We might say that the focus here is not on the realization of high-flown ideals that always seem to be just beyond our grasp. Living in humility also means living in and with our weaknesses and living by grace. For grace builds on the reality of our individual human existence, even on our brokenness. God leads human beings into their deepest weakness, to rock-bottom.[210] For this reason Benedict's chapter on humility is a description of our growth in experiencing God and in clarifying our self-knowledge. For Benedict, humility is not a virtue that we can acquire but rather an experience into which we grow.[211] I would like to call the humility described in RB 7 a fruit of the growing experience of God's grace.

Thus, let us consider the epilogue in RB 7. Up to here Benedict described how the human person always says in his heart, "Lord, I am a sinner," and how his entire external behavior expresses this Jesus Prayer, the prayer of the publican. In this epilogue Benedict made some small but significant changes in his source from RM. He also seems to be aware of Cassian and not only as he is mediated through RM (cf. below).[212] This entire epilogue is written in the future tense and thus is seen as a promise.

In contrast to this the heavenly vision described in RM 10.92-123 is omitted. In this way Benedict's ladder of humility ends on the earth with a description of the monk's goal (*skopos*) here on earth. It is love that drives out fear and goes hand in hand with reverence.[213]

V. 67: Thus, after having climbed all these steps of humility the monk will soon arrive at that love of God that is perfect and drives out fear. (*Ergo, his omnibus humilitatis gradibus ascensis, monachus mox ad caritatem Dei perveniet illam quae perfecta foris mittit timorem [1 John 4:18],*)

Benedict omits the Master's observation that this progress in humility occurs in "the fear of God," even though perfect love certainly goes hand in hand with the love of God. Yet Benedict simplifies by saying that the monk soon arrives at the "love of God" while RM says "the love of the Lord" that

210. Louf, "Humility and Obedience," 262–69; Grün, *Spiritualität*, *passim*.
211. Grün, *Spiritualität*, 34.
212. *Inst* IV.39.3.
213. Cassian, *Conf.* XI.13.4; XI.13.1-2; Augustine, *In Ps.* 18.10; cf. also Quartiroli, 99f.

without doubt means Christ (*ad caritatem . . . Domini*). Benedict seems to allude more precisely to the first letter of John. This perfect love that drives out fear is entirely God's work.[214] The human being is miserable, an empty shell into which God's grace, God's love can be poured forth. This is the opportunity created by all our limits and miseries when we accept them. They empty us of ourselves and open our hands so that we can stretch them out to God, asking for his love. All this then affects our behavior toward others.

The *caritas Dei* that human beings reach may be their love of God or the love God has for them, and perhaps even the love that God is himself (genitive of identity). This is suggested by the biblical context where we read that "God is love."[215] It is interesting to note that 1 John 4:17 also says that we may look to the day of judgment without fear, actually "with confidence," because we have begun to resemble God. Based on all this the expressions referring to the judgment in the twelfth step of humility are no longer frightening.

V. 68: Through this love he will begin to practice everything that he previously practiced not without fear, now practice without effort, as if by nature, and out of habit, (*per quam universa quae prius non sine formidine observabat absque ullo labore velut naturaliter ex consuetudine incipiet custodire,*)

Ease in doing what is good (*velut naturaliter*) as an expression of God's grace has its own dynamism. The root for this epilogue is found in Cassian, but RB and RM added to Cassian's text *ex consuetudine* or *ex consuetudine bona* (7.69). In doing this they probably allude to the monastic practices and rites, the daily schedules that the monk now accepts from inside. Fear as motivating good behavior is affirmed but serves only up to a point on the spiritual journey. In the twelfth step of humility we could actually still perceive a fear of judgment. RM describes in its chapter on humility a path leading from fear to love. Yet Benedict had interrupted the Master's schema already in the third step when he spoke of the love of God as a motivating factor in the connection with obedience.

The monk begins to keep the monastic practices. This is only a beginning, though we are already beyond the twelfth step of humility! An infinite

214. The expression *ad caritatem Dei* is found in Augustine, *In Rom.* 20; Cassian, *Conf.* I.10.5 equates the love of God (*caritas Dei*) with the contemplation of divine things (*contemplatio . . . divinarum rerum*) and purity of heart, calling it the summit of spiritual progress (*Conf.* III.7.8, referring to Paul, 1 Cor 13); cf. also Cassian *Conf.* XI.7.6, where he describes the progress from fear to hope, from hope to love, and from love to virtue.

215. 1 John 4:8; also 1 John 4:16 ("we believe in the love that God has for us"); and 4:19 ("we love because he [God] first loved us").

space opens up as our gracious God provides us again and again with a new beginning the longer we progress on the spiritual path. This was already shown in the Prologue with its repeated new beginnings summarized in the symbol of spiral.[216]

V. 69: no longer out of fear of hell but out of love for Christ and good habit and delight in virtue. (*non iam timore gehennae, sed amore Christi et consuetudine ipsa bona et delectatione virtutum.*)

The monk no longer needs to keep hell before his eyes and refrain from bad behavior out of fear of hell (cf. 7.11). At this point there is another motivation. RM, however, had alluded a second time to habit, saying, "no longer because of fear of hell, but out of very love for this good habit" (10.90). This was not enough for Benedict, and thus he made a decisive addition by saying "out of love for Christ." The all-important motivation is not just that which is good,[217] but the one who is good, not a good habit, but a person. For Benedict everything is centered in Christ, and with him in God, who is the creator of every love and the endpoint of all our yearning. We may also see this genitive in *amore Christi* as a subjective genitive, i.e., out of the love that Christ has for me and gives to me.

Further Benedict observes that everything is done out of delight in virtue, actually "in the virtues" (*delectatio virtutum*). Cassian has the same expression.[218] In the first step of humility Benedict warned that death was standing at the threshold of lust and pleasure (7.24). Even the verb "to delight" (*delectari*) was used in a negative sense.[219] Now the monk's aspirations have been transformed: he now delights in love, in patience, in obedience, in hospitality, and above all in God—just as he previously might have delighted in talking, laughing, and eating much as well as in being negligent.

V. 70: All this the Lord will now graciously deign to show in his laborer who through the Holy Spirit is clean from vices and sins. (*Quae Dominus iam operarium suum mundum a vitiis et peccatis Spiritu Sancto dignabitur demonstrare.*)

Benedict took this last verse verbatim from RM. The human being is now cleansed from vices and sins. This seems to be contrary to the twelfth step,

216. Cf. Böckmann, *Listening Community*, 76–79.

217. Cassian says the same in *Inst.* IV.39.3: *non iam contemplatio supplicii vel timore ullius, sed amore ispius boni et delectatio virtutum.*

218. *Inst.* IV.39.3; also *Conf.* XI.8.1: *non contemplatione poenarum, sed delectatione virtutum.* For other texts elucidating fear and love, cf. Puzicha, *Quellen*, 139–42.

219. 7.31: *Desideria sua non delectetur implore*; cf. 33.7: *nequissimo vitio delectari.*

where the human being confessed to be a sinner. Yet knowing ourselves to be sinners is precisely a sign of intensive experiences of God. We could call this the reverse side of mystical experiences. Paradoxically the spiritual journey leads us from being just to being fully conscious of our misery. In this way we are able to experience God's love more and more and to make room for it in our hearts and minds.

At this stage all activity passes over to the Holy Spirit. Being cleansed from vices and sins, delight in virtue, ease of doing what is good, love—all this is now seen as a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's presence. The monk has, as it were, given free rein to the Spirit so that the Spirit can be fully effective in him.

This epilogue is similar to verse 49 of the Prologue, a later insertion of Benedict. There he speaks of the expanded heart and the unspeakable sweetness of love. The Holy Spirit, or the holy Trinity, can dwell and act in a human heart that has been emptied of its egoistic self. Already in Prol.30 Benedict said that such human beings "praise the Lord working in them" (*operantem in se dominum magnificant*).

In these last verses Benedict provides a trinitarian perspective: the love that God the Father gives us or is, our love for Christ or his love for us, and the activity of the Holy Spirit. We are led into the mystery of the Holy Trinity and its dynamism. Yet RB alludes to all this only in a very discreet manner.

In the first stage of the spiritual journey the human being is called a laborer (*operarius*), he or she must add earnest efforts, practice ascesis, try hard to cleanse him- or herself from evil, then strive for virtue, yet all that is essential is the work of God. The second stage of the journey began to be visible from the sixth step on and becomes fully evident here. In this stage we are receptive for the grace and love of God. Yet this does not result in the monk's departure from the community or in the fact that he performs heroic deeds but that, instead of performing everything out of fear and with great effort, he now does everything as if naturally and with ease and, above all, out of love. Perhaps not very much seems changed in exterior behavior, but inside everything is changed. This is a dynamism that works from inside while not destroying the external everyday life! Such human beings are precious members of a community and effective apostles, they are always available as instruments for God's working and will never cease to push onward.[220]

220. Böckmann, "Benedictine Mysticism," 93–95; Borias, "Vers la charité," 67f.; Vogüé, *Histoire littéraire*, IX, 117.

Benedict certainly takes for granted Cassian's doctrine of the spiritual journey where the goal of monastic life on earth (*skopos*) is called *apatheia* (best translated as equanimity) or sometimes *caritas*.[221]

Looking back, we can name some characteristic traits of humility:

- The monk is serious about his promises.
- He is free from inner and psychological conflicts and thus is able to follow Christ; he is able to persevere through difficulties and suffering.
- He is honest with himself.
- He is not ambitious and has no need to come forward and be in the center of attention. Nor does he hide behind a wall of many words and jokes.
- He is transparent in his goodness.[222]
- Humility is not a virtue that we can reach by sheer effort, but we can pray for it; it is a grace.

Benedict describes the spiritual journey of a human being or, better, a path of God that leads into a person's innermost heart.

221. Cf. Déseille, "Concerning the Epilogue to RB 7"; cf. Cassian, *Conf.* I.7 (synopsis of "purity of heart" and "love").

222. Casey, *Truthful Living*, 253.

Conclusion

Translator's Note: In the German original the author's first volume of her commentary comprises the entire Prologue and RB 1–7. In the English translations this material is found in two volumes, the present one and the preceding one, *A Listening Community* (Liturgical Press, 2011). The German "Conclusion" refers, of course, to the Prologue and RB 1–7. In considering how to handle these last pages in the present translation Sr. Aquinata felt that it seemed more appropriate to leave the conclusion as it is and not to "cut and paste," which would not have done justice to the unity of this first part of RB, its "spiritual document." Readers thus need to be aware that they will encounter references to the explanations of the Prologue and RB 1–3, which are found in the earlier volume. In order to facilitate understanding, I have added footnotes with page references to the preceding volume.

❑

As we survey these chapters once more, it becomes clear that, methodologically, each and every line needs to be read in the context of both its chapter and the entire Rule. Yet the historical-critical exegesis is also necessary in order to perceive more clearly the particular profile of Benedict and to grasp more deeply the meaning that his directives can have for us today. In this respect, I am convinced that the Rule of the Master has great importance, especially for these early chapters of RB, because in so many places Benedict deviates from it by making changes, insertions, omissions. Of course, he also copies many regulations that seemed important to him. Especially for the first chapters of RB (until RB 7) I find it indispensable to read RB and RM concurrently. Often the changes seem minor, yet when taken together, Benedict appears as a person who knows what he wants and whose changes indicate a clear direction. Therefore, even minor deviations have been pointed out and discussed.

In various places we were able to recognize several layers in revising the final text. There is hardly any research concerning Benedict's redactional process. Thus, it takes some courage to present a possible sequence.

The texts that Benedict more or less copied from RM may very well have constituted his first redaction. Perhaps larger omissions happened at the same time: the long diatribe against the gyrovagues in RM 1; the theological part at the end of that same chapter;[1] in the chapter on the abbot the theological passages, the similarity of the monastic community to a family with children (RM 2.26-31), and the fact that the Master absolves the monks of any responsibility when they comply with what their head and master asks them to do.[2] The omissions in the next chapters are important, especially in RB 5 with regard to obedience seen as martyrdom for the monks (RM 7.52-66), the omission of the anthropological treatise (RM 8.1-30), and the formulaic introductions to the steps of humility as well as the eschatological prospects in RM 3 (RB 4) and RM 10 (RB 7).

Additions might have been made later, e.g., in the chapter on the abbot: determinations regarding the regular order in rank, cutting out faults right at their beginning, taking for granted that monks would need corporeal punishment in order to improve, the repeated urging that the abbot always adapt his teachings to the individual monks and that he give priority to the spiritual good (salvation of souls, the kingdom of God) over the worldly concerns that apparently burdened the monastery.[3] Only then could he have written a chapter of his own about calling the brothers for counsel, thus giving the brothers' council special importance. Yet Benedict is also realistic enough to see that the brothers can be stubborn. As shown in the discussion of this chapter, Benedict's vocabulary in RB 3 mirrors that of the Rule's last chapters from RB 64 on, and particularly of RB 65 and RB 68.[4]

We can only make conjectures about the time when Benedict made additions. With regard to the addition of 2.33-36 in the chapter on the abbot—reminding him not to use "lack of resources" as an excuse for neglecting the care of souls[5]—we can, however, place it in the time after 535, the beginning of the Gothic Wars. The emphasis on the Rule, a growing strictness, and the increasing realism with regard to the faults of the monks points to the chapters dealing with correcting the monks in the correctional code (RB 23–30). Looking at RB 27—a chapter that was also added later—shows that

1. *Listening Community*, 89, 108ff.
2. Ibid., 117f., 151ff., 123, 162f.
3. *Listening Community,* 141ff., 146ff., 151f., 157f., 158ff.
4. *Listening Community*, RB 3 *passim*, 167–202.
5. Cf. *Listening Community*, 161, 183, 199.

Benedict became more pastoral and merciful precisely with regard to the dark realities of human failings (cf. also 64.13).

We may also ask when Benedict might have written the verse about the expansion of the heart and the unspeakable joy of love (Prol.49), along with his encouraging the beginner not to run away. We may conjecture that going through these crises and experiencing much sorrow and even dissent from his monks, Benedict grew spiritually and threw himself on the wideness of God's mercy, thus becoming an empty vessel for the presence and mercy of God. It seems to me that Prol.49 may very well be the last addition Benedict made.

Apparently he continued to work on the Rule throughout his entire life, until his last years. It is this continuing work that infuses his Rule with the nature of true experience, making his Rule an *experientia magistra*, "the mistress/teacher" of experience under whom monastics are trained.[6]

Benedict himself seems to have been a person with deep experiences of God. This experience allows him to be more human and more sensitive and to know, even taste, the "unspeakable sweetness of God's love."

Do these chapters, i.e., the Prologue and RB 1–7, represent the Rule's fundamental spirituality? My answer is affirmative under the condition that this first part of the Rule was written in the light of the later chapters. They too are spiritual even though they describe—read superficially—only concrete matters. But above all, RB 72 must be seen and read along with this first part.

In conclusion I would like to try to summarize how the person of Benedict can be recognized in this first part (this image, of course, must be rounded out in the second and third volume of this exegetical commentary).

Benedict sees how decadent his monks are, how quickly they are discouraged, how negligent and rebellious, but he does not withdraw his solidarity with them. Rather, he thinks that faults are to be corrected as soon as they appear, at times even with strictness.

He is a true realist: he dislikes long theories (as in RM); instead, he is focused on practicing. He is not a man of many words but one of a few and important words! He seems to prefer what is "reasonable." He omits many of the rituals and especially the long speeches and theories of his source.

Although he has a very realistic view of his monks, he entrusts them with responsibility in matters of obedience and when they are called to counsel.

He does not view the monastery as a prison with an abbot who tortures his disciples as if they were martyrs so that they "must" become saints. He has a realistic view of the devil but is not obsessed with him.

6. Cf. *Listening,* 91, 94f., 103–105, 173f., 191f., 201.

Apparently he values the earlier monastic literature and allows himself to be inspired by its examples, yet he does not do so uncritically. This already endows the first chapters of his Rule with the quality of discretion.

His view of the human person is rooted in the Bible; he knows that in all things we depend on God's grace, but he also energetically encourages our own human efforts.

It is evident that he is in a continuous dialogue with Sacred Scripture, which is for him like a living person. The psalms accompany the monks on their entire spiritual journey and are never superfluous.

The frequent depiction of Benedict putting his finger to his lips—often used and copied—certainly must be complemented by a monk with a wide heart and open arms.

In all these chapters we sense Benedict's Christocentrism from beginning to end. For him, Christ is the risen, present Lord who walks ahead of us, with us, in whom we can trust and who lives in us.

Abbreviations

A. PERIODICALS, ENCYCLOPEDIAS, SERIES, EDITIONS

I have used *italics* for *periodicals* and *titles of books*; regular print for series. Series of English translations are added. English translations of encyclopedias are given in parentheses.

ABR	*The American Benedictine Review*
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
ANF	Anti-Nicene Fathers; ANF 10 [1994] contains useful indices to ANF and NPNF (NPNF both first and second series, given as $NPNF^{1}$ and $NPNF^{2}$).
Ben	*Benedictines*. Atchison, Kansas, USA
Boon	A. Boon, *Pachominiana latina*. Louvain, 1932
CC	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
Cetedoc	Cetedoc I. Library of Christian Latin Texts (CD). Louvain, 1996
CollCist	*Collectanea Cisterciensia*. Forges
CS	*Cistercian Studies Quarterly*
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vienna, 1866ff.
CuadMon	*Cuadernos Monasticos*. Cordoba, Argentina
DIP	*Dizionario degli Instituti di Perfezione*. Rome, 1973ff.
DS	*Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. Paris, 1937ff.
EA	*Erbe und Auftrag* (previously *Benediktinische Monatsschrift*). Beuron
FC	Fathers of the Church
GuL	*Geist und Leben*. Würzburg
LL	*Lettre de Ligugé*
LThK	*Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*. Freiburg, ^{2}1957ff.
MonInf	*Monastische Informationen*. Eibingen
Mst	*Monastic Studies*. Mount Saviour
$NPNF^{1, 2}$	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 1 and 2
PG	Patrologia Graeca. Ed. J. P. Migne. Paris, 1857ff.
PL	Patrologia Latina. Ed. J. P. Migne. Paris, 1878ff.
PsRom	Psalterium Romanum; ed. Robert Weber. *Le psautier romain et les autres psautiers latins*. Rome, 1953

RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*. Stuttgart, 1941ff.
RAM	*Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* (Later: RHSp)
RB (Hanslik)	*Benedicti Regula*. Ed. R. Hanslik (CSEL 75). Vienna, ^{2}1977
RB (Steidle)	*Die Benediktusregel lateinisch-deutsch*. Ed. B. Steidle. Beuron, ^{2}1975
RB (Vogüé)	*La Règle de S. Benoît*. Ed. A. de Vogüé and J. Neufville, 2 vols. (SC 181–82). Paris, 1972
RB 80	*The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*. Ed. T. Fry, et al. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981
RBén	*Revue bénédictine*. Maredsous
RBS	*Regula Benedicti Studia*. Hildesheim
RHSp	*Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* (previously RAM). Toulouse
RM	*Regula Magistri*. Ed. A. de Vogüé, 2 vols., SC 105–6 (*The Rule of the Master*. Trans. L. Eberle. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977)
SC	Sources chrétiennes. Paris, 1941ff.
StA	*Studia Anselmiana*. Rome
StMon	*Studia Monastica*. Barcelona
SupplRBS	Supplementa, Regulae Benedicti Studia. Hildesheim, 1974ff.
ThWNT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. Ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. This is a translation of the German work, edited by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI, and London, 1954ff.
Tj	*Tjurunga*. Tarrawarra, Australia
TRE	*Theologische Realenzyklopädie*. Berlin, 1976ff.
TU	*Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*. Berlin, 1882ff.
VitaMon	*Vita Monastica*
VL	Vetus Latina: Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel. Beuron, 1949ff.
Vogüé *II–VII*	A. de Vogüé, *La Règle de S. Benoît* (cf. Secondary Sources); Roman numerals indicate the volume of this work/edition. Vol. VII is translated into English: *The Rule of Saint Benedict: Doctrinal and Spiritual Commentary*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983; cited as *RB-DSC*
Vulg	Vulgata; quoted according Bibliorum Sacrorum iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam nova editio. Ed. A. Gramatica. Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1951
WSp	*Word and Spirit*. Still River

B. OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

Art.	Article (in encyclopedias)
dub.	*dubia* (doubts)
Ed.	Edited by
Ep.	Epistle
fasc.	fascicle
H.	Homily
ibid.	*ibidem* (in the same place)
Lib.	*Liber* (book)
n.	Footnote
n.d.	no date
Praec.	*Praeceptum, Praecepta* (Precept[s])
Praef.	*Praefatio* (Preface)
Prol.	Prologue
Ps	before a name: Pseudo
s.	*sermo* (sermon)
Th	*thema* (theme in the sense of a brief explanation)
Thp	theme/explanation on the *Pater noster* (Our Father) in RM
Ths	theme/explanation on the psalm in RM
T	title (of a chapter, e.g., in RB)
V(v.)	Verse(s)
Vit.	*Vita* (life of a saint)

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Ambrose

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De offic	*De officiis ministrorum*: PL 16.23; CC 15; Ed. G. Banterle. Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1977. NPNF[2] 10.1–89.
ExhortVg	*Exhortatio Virginitatis* in: *Opera omnia.* S. Ambrogio. Ed. F. Gori: Biblioteca Ambrosiana 14.2.
In Lc	*Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*: CC 14
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CivDei	*De civitate Dei*: PL 41.13; CCL 47–48. Innumerable English editions, useful are those in the Everyman series, in Doubleday, Image Books, Penguin.
Contr Cresc	*Contra Cresconium*: CSEL 52, PL 43.445–594.
De Bapt	*De Baptismo:* CSEL 51.
De corr	*De correptione et gratia*: PL 44.
De Ord	*De ordine, libri II:* CSEL 63.
In Joh.	*In Joannis Evangelium tractatus*: PL 35.1379; CCL 36. NPNF[1] 7.7.
OM	*Ordo monasterii*: Verheijen, I, 482–52. Trans. G. Bonner. *The Monastic Rules*, cf. below.
Praec	*Praeceptum*; Verheijen, *Règle*. Trans. *The Monastic Rules.* Trans. G. Bonner. New City, 2004.
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In Ps *Expositio in Psalmos*: PG 55.

Cyprian of Carthage

Ad Demetr *Ad Demetrianum*: CSEL 3.1. ("To Demetrian." Transl. R.J. Deferari. FC 36. 161–94).
De bono pat *De bono patentiae*: CSEL 3.1. FC 36 257–87.
DomOr *De dominica oratio*: PL 4.520; 47.1113; CSEL 3/1 . FC 36 125–62; ACW 20; ANF 5.447.
De lapsis CSEL 3.1
Ep. *Epistulae*: PL 4.224; CSEL 3/2. ANF 5.275; with different numbering: FC 51.
Testim *Testimonium libri tres, Ad Quirinum*: CSEL 3.1
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Passio Sebastiani **PL 17**

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3RegPatr *Tertia Regula Patrum*: SC 297

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Vitae Patrum

VitPat *Vitae Patrum III-IV-V-VII*: PL 73.

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